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THE
BARGE OF HAUNTED LIVES



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TORONTO

THE BARGE OF HAUNTED LIVES

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE SCARLET TANAGER"

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THE
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CHAPTER I

A SALT MARSH ADVENTURE

For more than two hours, a solitary hunter, crouching in a reed-covered sneak-boat that was drawn close to a muddy bank topped with coarse, yellow grass, had been gazing moodily skyward or across the broad expanse of gloomy marshes to the north of Great South Bay. Near him a score of gray and black decoy ducks bobbed lightly on the chill, drab waters of a wide creek, but their complacent attitudes thus far had failed to inspire among vagrant wildfowl any desire to seek their companionship.

The hunter was a thick-set, sullen-looking man, with a broad, clean-shaven face and thick, curly gray hair. He had only one eye—a greenish-yellow, searching left eye which often produced uncanny effects on persons on whom it gazed. For five years it had been this man's wont to go down to Sellersville on the first day of November. There he was known to Captain Peters, the boathouse-keeper, as Colonel Canbeck. From Peters he hired a little sloop, with a rusty motor that was barely powerful enough to drive the craft up and down the tidal creeks, which, flowing through the monotonous expanse of salt meadows, empty into Great South Bay.

The sloop had a closed cabin in which were a couple of bunks, a folding table, several lockers and a stove. Canbeck's shooting trips lasted one week, and he always went

on them alone, seldom getting more than ten or twelve miles from the Peters boathouse. Upon arriving at the shooting grounds, he would anchor the sloop, and for two or three days at a time the little craft would remain at the same anchorage. Leaving the sloop alone, Canbeck would paddle off in a sneak-boat, sometimes a mile or two distant, and, after floating his decoys, he would sit motionless for hours, within his screen of reeds, except when, fortune favoring him, he was engaged in bringing down and gathering in such wildfowl as exposed themselves to his unerring aim.

It was now a few minutes after four o'clock, and the gray sky and lapping waters were growing more chill and dark. It was Canbeck's first day out this season, and since ten o'clock in the morning his gun had been silent. With an exclamation of disgust, he deposited it in the bottom of the boat and began preparations for his return to the sloop.

As the duckhunter, with reluctant hands, began to draw in one of the strings to which his floating decoys were attached, he swept a last questioning glance around him. Suddenly the expression of bored resignation on his features gave place to one of mild interest. Faintly, at first, but soon more distinctly, he heard the distant drone of an airplane. For several moments his attempts to locate the plane were vain; then he saw it—a small, black blot on the western sky. Uncertain concerning the course it was taking, Canbeck reflected that it probably was one of the machines attached to the Mineola flying field and now was returning to its base.

But, as the drone became more viciously assertive, Canbeck observed that the great, man-made hawk was speeding eastward, leaving Mineola further and further behind it, following a course which would take it directly

over his head. As it drew nearer, however, it veered suddenly, and Canbeck saw it was a seaplane, flying at a height of about six hundred feet above creeks and meadows. Immediately after it veered, it circled toward the west and mounted higher. After proceeding about a mile in that direction, it turned again and headed eastward, gliding lightly and gracefully downward, in the manner of an albatross as it sinks to the surface of the sea.

As the high, muddy bank of the creek hid from his view the final stage of the seaplane's descent, Canbeck fell to speculating on the purpose of the airman in bringing down his craft at such a time and place. The creek in which he had spent the day emptied into the bay at a point scarcely more than two hundred yards from where he now sat in his sneak-boat, and it was apparent that it was just beyond the mouth of the creek that the flying-boat had come to water. But from that direction there now came no sound.

The impulse to seek some point from which the movements of the seaplane might be viewed was so slight that Canbeck quickly smothered it. He lighted his pipe, smoked reflectively for several minutes, then addressed himself to the task of taking in his decoys. He was thus engaged when a succession of clattering, explosive sounds, near the mouth of the creek, indicated that the motors of the seaplane again were in action.

Nearly three minutes passed, however, before the flying-boat became visible to the eyes of the watching duck-hunter. Now, once more clear of the bay, it was headed seaward. Higher and higher it mounted toward the darkening sky, then, turning, it took a westerly course.

Canbeck still was watching the retreating plane when his attention was attracted by the quacking of frightened

ducks. He promptly crouched, picked up his gun and raised its muzzle. A few moments later he discharged both barrels and three ducks, out of a flock of a dozen, dropped into the stream. He was preparing to paddle out to gather in the dead wildfowl when a quiet voice near him caused him to start and turn abruptly.

"I beg your pardon, but will you tell me whether it will be possible for me to get to a railway station to-night?"

The soft, well-modulated voice was that of a woman, who stood on the bank near the sneak-boat. The duck-hunter, frowning, looked at the speaker with astonishment. Habitually morose, he had as little liking for women as they had for him, but in the aspect of this one there was something that fairly startled him. Had he seen her in a ballroom, in the lobby of a hotel, behind the footlights of a stage or on the deck of a transatlantic liner, she would have held his gaze for a few moments, then he would have passed on, phlegmatically admitting to himself that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, but would have given no more thought to her.

In this environment, however, the rare beauty of this stranger affected him strangely, and the thrill that passed through him was of the sort that may come to a man in the presence of the supernatural. He promptly combated and conquered the awe with which she inspired him, but he never could have described her. More soberly appraising her, Canbeck saw the speaker was young, rather above the average height of her sex, with a straight, admirably proportioned figure, a matchless complexion, black hair and dark eyes that had the lustre of moonlighted waters. Her hair was disordered, however, and her gray Tam-'o-Shanter was a little askew. She wore a neatly fitting tailor-made gown of heavy gray

cloth, and the protection afforded by the jacket of this was supplemented by a plaid golf cape. Her stockings and high shoes were spattered with mud.

For several moments the duckhunter stared vacantly at the young woman who had hailed him. She repeated her question:

"Can you tell me if it will be possible for me to get to a railway to-night?"

"How, in Heaven's name, did you get out here?" Canbeck demanded.

"I came in the seaplane," the young woman replied, and now there was a note of sharpness in her voice.

The duckhunter, turning deliberately, gazed thoughtfully toward where the flying-boat appeared to be scarcely larger than an eagle in the distance.

"The devil you did!" he muttered; then, in a louder voice, he asked: "Why did it leave you in such a place as this?"

"Frankly, I do not know. I was compelled to alight, however."

"Compelled!" Canbeck exclaimed. "Am I to understand that you were left here against your will?"

"It is scarcely such a place as a woman would select to pass the night," the fair stranger retorted, curtly.

"You are right," the duckhunter assented. "But how did it happen that—"

"Pardon me if I remind you that I was the first to ask a question and that it still is unanswered," interrupted the young woman, with some severity. "Will it be possible for me to get to a railway station at which I can get a train for New York to-night?"

"I am very much afraid it will not be possible, madame," Canbeck replied, with rather more politeness in his manner than had been apparent before. "It already is

getting dark and the tide is ebbing. The nearest railway station is at Sellersville, which, in a direct line, is seven miles from here, but between the village and this spot are several creeks, so the meadows cannot be crossed on foot. In order to get there by my sloop we would have to leave this creek, go out into the bay and enter a long, winding creek which only a native can navigate after nightfall—a distance of about eleven miles. I am not a Long Islander and so am not competent to undertake the task."

The expression of distrust that had settled on the young woman's features gradually disappeared while the duck-hunter was speaking. There was something in the aspect and voice of the speaker which encouraged the fair aeronaut in the belief that he was a man who could be trusted. When she first had met the gaze of that single eye she had been conscious of a feeling of creepiness and suddenly awakened fear. But, as Canbeck spoke, he looked away from her. His voice was deep, clear and deliberate, and, despite his rough garb, there was something in the man that bespoke a certain degree of refinement. Being a young woman of quick perception, the fair stranger also recognized the fact that this man's spirit of chivalry was rather more perfunctory than earnest—in short, that his aid would be offered as a result of a sense of duty rather than a sense of pleasure. She was only twenty-two and he was well past fifty, but she involuntarily straightened her Tam-o'-Shanter and glanced ruefully at the mud on her skirt and cape.

"Is that the boat to which you refer?" she asked, as Canbeck paused.

"Oh, bless you, no! This is only a sneaker. The boat I speak of is that little sloop over yonder. There's a cabin on her, with a couple of bunks and a stove. The center-board trunk divides the cabin, and a piece of tarpaulin will

make a couple of rooms of it, with a bunk in each. I can get a hot supper, if you like, and you can turn in afterward on your side of the tarpaulin and centerboard. As soon as the sun is up I'll get you to Sellersville."

An expression of vexation settled on the young woman's face and she compressed her lips slightly.

"You have nothing to do, then, with the canal-boat?" she asked.

"With the canal-boat!" Canbeck repeated wonderingly.

"Yes—it is a canal-boat, isn't it? Or is it a barge?"

"I am afraid I do not understand you," replied the duckhunter.

The young woman frowned impatiently.

"I mean the boat that is lying in the other creek," she said.

"I did not know that there was a boat of any kind in the other creek," Canbeck explained.

Once more the young woman was looking at him searchingly, and, as she looked, distrust again entered her eyes.

"How long have you been here—here in this creek?" she asked.

"I entered it from the bay about seven o'clock this morning, but I saw no boat in the other creek."

She looked over her shoulder.

"True," she said, "one cannot see it from here. It does not show above the bank and the meadow grass. There is a canal-boat there, however, and, while I was in that miserable seaplane I saw smoke issuing from the stovepipe on the roof of the deck-house."

"Ah!" exclaimed the duckhunter, and the expression of relief on his features was unmistakable. "Most canal-boats have the families of their captains on board, so we may be able to find a woman on this, and a woman

doubtless can make you more comfortable than I can. We will see."

"You will go with me?"

"Certainly—if you will permit me to do so. It is better, perhaps, that you should not go alone."

Canbeck drew in his decoys; then he paddled his boat to the bank.

"Shall I take your gun?" the young woman asked, as the duckhunter prepared to disembark from his craft.

"If you will, please."

The manner in which she took the weapon from his hand indicated that firearms were not strange to her.

"The ducks you shot are drifting downstream," she said, suggestively.

"I can spare them. I did pretty well this morning."

Canbeck threw on the bank the big stone that did service as an anchor, then, taking his gun from the small, gloved hands that held it, he led the way over the spongy surface of the meadow toward the neighboring creek.

As the young woman followed her conductor, she saw that his shoulders were broad and square and that his thick-set figure was singularly erect. Then, too, there was something in the precision of his steps that suggested that there had been a period in his life during which he had carried arms for purposes other than shooting ducks.

"An army man, and probably a West Pointer," she murmured.

They had only about three hundred yards to go and the distance soon was covered. When they arrived at the creek, the duckhunter saw that the young woman had spoken truly. There was a long, broad, black barge lying beside the bank of the creek—a creek scarcely more than three times the width of the boat itself. From the stove-

pipe on the roof of the deckhouse a thin cloud of smoke was issuing.

The port rail of the boat was against, and some three feet below, the bank. The duckhunter stepped aboard, and, grasping a rough wooden stool, he placed it in such a position that his companion could step on it from the bank above. This done, he extended her a hand and helped her aboard.

Without speaking, Canbeck led the way to the door of the deckhouse at the stern. This was closed, and he knocked. To the knock there was no reply. Canbeck grasped the knob and thrust the door open cautiously.

The duckhunter now found himself in a dingy, unpainted cabin which was manifestly a storeroom. It was about twelve feet wide and fourteen long, and was filled with barrels and wooden cases which, it was plain, contained provisions. At the forward end appeared the head of a companionway. To the left, rising from the floor to the roof, was the pipe whose top had been seen from without.

"Queer barge—this!" he muttered. "They are doing their cooking below."

He drew a thick, stubby wooden pipe from his pocket and with this he rapped sharply several times on the door at the foot of the companionway. This summons also failed to elicit an answer. Finding that this door, too, was unlocked, Canbeck pushed it open. The fair aeronaut, standing on the steps behind him, saw him stop suddenly as an exclamation of amazement fell from his lips.

From the half-open door came a flood of mellow light and an odor which was suggestive of that which permeates the atmosphere of cathedrals after the celebration of a mass—the odor which emanates from swinging censers borne by priests.

"You had better wait there," said the duckhunter in a low voice, as, moving back a step, he glanced over his shoulder at his companion.

But the aeronaut was a woman, and so it came to pass that when the duckhunter, having entered the apartment, heard the door close behind him with a soft click, he found his companion was beside him.

"Why did you not stay outside?" the duckhunter demanded sharply.

The young woman, looking around her with wide, staring eyes, gave no heed to his question.

"In the name of all that is wonderful—" she began.

With a shrug of impatience, the duckhunter turned to the door and grasped the knob.

"They've locked us in!" he muttered.

She heard him now.

"Locked us in!" she exclaimed with sudden apprehension. "Who do you mean by 'they'?"

"How should I know? But come—let's get away from this door."

Grasping the young woman roughly by one of her arms, Canbeck led her a few paces to the left.

"Keep your back to this wall and your eyes on the curtains at the other end of the room," he cautioned in a low voice.

The first part of his advice she heeded, the second she ignored, for the spectacle which now offered itself to her view was so extraordinary that her curiosity exceeded her fears.

The apartment was about thirty-five feet in length, twenty in breadth and ten in height. The walls were covered with rich crimson damask and those on the sides were pierced by niches of polished black wood—there being twelve niches in all. In each niche was a statue

wrought in gleaming white marble. Though these statues represented different subjects, all possessed two remarkable features in common. Each represented a human figure, which, like many of the sculptures of Auguste Rodin, was only partly hewn from the rough block. In no instance, however, was the face of the statue revealed, each being hidden in a manner that differed from the others. The features of one female figure were covered with the hands, while those of a second were obscured by a veil. The form of a tense-muscled man appeared to be struggling to free itself from the rough block from which it was hewn with great perfection of detail, but the head, thrown backward, was still a part of the block and only a few outlines of the face were even faintly perceptible. Other faces were hidden by falling, dishevelled hair, behind masks or within the closed visors of helmets.

At the further end of the apartment was a broad doorway which was approached by three wide, carpet-covered steps. On each side of these steps, on a low pedestal, was a full suit of armor. Each right gauntlet grasped an upright lance and the raised visors of the helmets revealed the hideous faces of grinning skulls. In the doorway hung a pair of heavy velvet curtains of the same color as the damask-covered walls, and, on each side of the doorway, niches in the wall held large Etruscan vases. The apartment was lighted by numerous candelabra set in the walls between the niches.

The floor was covered with a large Oriental rug of which the prevailing colors were red, black and yellow. The carved ceiling was black, with a curious mosaic centerpiece from which depended a heavy bronze chain that sustained a large and elaborately wrought lamp of Arabesque design. The lamp hung over the center of a table about ten feet long and six feet wide—a table with

appointments scarcely less remarkable than the room in which it had a place. A snowy cloth, hanging low over the sides and ends of this concealed its wood and carvings, but on the cloth were crystal and gold and silverware befitting a feast of royalty.

The table was laid for ten persons, there being four chairs at each side and one at each end. The chairs were of carved ebony, with arms, the seats and backs being covered with heavy Japanese brocade of black and gold. Other chairs of similar design stood against the wall, as did also several ottomans that were covered with costly skins and rugs.

As the duckhunter, still grasping his fowling-piece and looking around him, moved forward a couple of paces, he saw an upright sarcophagus, with the cover removed. Within the sarcophagus was the gilded cartonnage of a mummy, and the face painted on this was the only representation of normal human features among the figures in the room. The sarcophagus stood midway between two doors—one of these being the door through which Canbeck and his companion had entered. The duckhunter inferred that the second door communicated with the room containing the stove from which rose the pipe that passed through the deckhouse to its roof.

"What does it all mean?" asked the young woman, in a voice that was scarcely louder than a whisper.

"It may mean much or little," the duckhunter muttered. "No one but a lunatic would fit up a barge like this and have it towed out here. If there is only one of his class aboard we probably shall have little difficulty in getting out, but—well, the table is laid for ten."

The young woman, gazing around her with wondering eyes, murmured:

"It looks like some of those strange places—those

cabarets in Montmartre, in Paris—the Chat Noir, the House of Death and——"

"It will look many other things as well if I am compelled to let these two barrels go," growled the duckhunter, as, passing a hand under his coat, he reached for a couple of "Double B" shells.

The words were scarcely spoken, however, when Canbeck and the young woman started suddenly.

From the other end of the room came the sound of a low, chuckling laugh. The curtains in the doorway shook for a moment, then they were slowly thrust aside and the figure of a tall man in evening dress appeared between them.

The hair of the newcomer was white, but his dark-skinned, clean-shaven face was devoid of wrinkles, and his gray eyes were as clear and shining as those of a youth. His head was admirably shaped, but was scarcely as large as is usual in the case of men of such large stature. His limbs were long, and he stooped slightly, but there was a grace and courtliness in his bearing which indicated that he was as well endowed with drawing-room accomplishments as he was with physical strength. As he looked down now at the duckhunter, his thin lips were smiling. There was a mocking, penetrating and unfathomable expression in his gray eyes.

"If you must shoot, my friend, let us have one barrel at a time," he said.

Thus speaking, he descended the three steps in front of the doorway.

Canbeck and his companion fairly gasped for breath. The man who so suddenly had confronted them was a familiar figure on two continents—in fashionable clubs, in boxes at the opera, at race meetings, at public dinners and in the councils of princes of finance. Neither of the

persons whom he now was approaching had met him, but his portrait had appeared so often in illustrated journals that his features were as familiar to schoolboys throughout the land as was the face of the nation's President. In short, the newcomer was none other than Hewitt Westfall, the multimillionaire.

Fixing his gaze on the duckhunter, Westfall, still smiling, added:

"We had been expecting you to dinner, Colonel Canbeck. I was only awaiting the arrival of a boat, which should be here in a few minutes, in order to visit you and ask you to join our party this evening. But, thanks to the appearance of the seaplane and your gallantry, such a visit has been made unnecessary."

Frowning slightly, Canbeck regarded the speaker searchingly.

"You were expecting me to dinner—here—to-day?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes," replied the millionaire, easily. "And the fact that you come as escort to our guest of honor makes you doubly welcome."

Nodding genially, Westfall now turned to Canbeck's wondering companion.

"Your highness——" he began.

The young woman started violently, and, as the color left her features, she gazed with widening, frightened eyes at the man who thus addressed her.

"Highness!" she murmured in a low, trembling voice.

As if oblivious of the consternation with which he had inspired her, Westfall approached, and, taking her hands, said gravely:

"And now, your highness, permit an honored and appreciative host—Hewitt Westfall—to welcome the Princess Maranotti to the Barge of Haunted Lives, on

which it will be his pleasure to present to you certain persons who have been victims of some of the most remarkable misadventures that ever have fallen to the lot of men. Most of these persons are unknown to you, and even they have yet to learn that their strange lives have taken color from your own."

A little cry of astonishment and pain escaped the young woman's lips, and there was a wild look in her eyes as, withdrawing her hands from those of Westfall, she glanced furtively towards the door through which she had entered the apartment. Westfall gently laid a hand on one of her shoulders.

"Have no fear, your highness," he said kindly. "Among the persons of whom I have spoken there is none who willingly would cause you pain. All are here in an attempt to lead you from that spectre-peopled wood in which, for the last three years, you have been groping blindly. When we are done, you will have no reason to reproach me for the visit I have caused you to make to the Barge of Haunted Lives."

CHAPTER II

AT DESTINY'S CROSSROADS

"AND WHAT is the Barge of Haunted Lives?" asked the duckhunter, sharply.

Westfall, looking thoughtfully at the floor, replied:

"Well, Canbeck, it's the product of a hobby—the hobby of one who, for many years, has found diversion in the study of the strange fates that befall mankind. It is a vessel as clumsy, ugly and as helpless on the waves as are the barks which bear most men on the stormy sea of Destiny. It is moved from place to place by a tugboat—one of those inconsequential craft, which, while unable to make long, stormy and romantic voyages themselves, often are in a position to lend helping hands to great vessels which can do these things if they only get into proper channels. The tug gets them there, and, in this respect, I am a great deal like the tug. When I find a brother craft, enveloped in a fog and drifting toward the reef of error, I throw him a line and tow him out. But I am no hypocrite, so I will confess that only a certain class of sufferers finds it possible to excite my interest—the class which consists of men and women of haunted lives."

"Ah, I see," exclaimed the duckhunter, moodily. "You find diversion in the unravelling of other men's mysteries."

"No. I simply afford them certain facilities for unravelling such mysteries themselves."

"It's a queer sort of place you give to them in which to do it," growled the duckhunter, looking around dubiously.

Westfall laughed quietly.

"It suffices," he said, resignedly. "And, after all, it is doubtful whether a more appropriate scene for such endeavors may be found. Everything you see around you came here as a result of tales that have been told beneath this roof."

"Those statues without faces?" queried the duckhunter.

"Everything. I first saw this barge when I was summoned to it one night to bid a last farewell to a man who, years before, had been one of my most intimate friends. In consequence of an unfortunate act, he became a fugitive—a pariah. When I reached his side he was dying—the worst example of a haunted life I have ever known. In respect to his memory I bought the barge and fitted it up as a place of refuge for persons who might be fleeing from ghosts of their misdeeds or misfortunes. It has had many interesting visitors, I assure you."

His eyes had wandered to the aeronaut again, and, pausing in his speech, he continued to gaze at her thoughtfully. Then, rousing himself suddenly, he laid a hand on one of the shoulders of the duckhunter.

"And so, my dear Canbeck, you don't like my statues," he said.

The duckhunter shook his head.

"I'm no judge of art, I'm afraid," he answered surlily.

"Well, some excellent judges have expressed rather favorable opinions on these same marbles," Westfall replied. "I had them from the sculptor himself—a queer fellow, who was the victim of one of the strangest misfortunes I ever have known. During the last five years

of his life, this man, who had attained many artistic triumphs before, dared not carve a human face. In every block of marble there was a face that haunted him, and, strive as he would, he could carve no other. It mattered not whether his model was man or woman, maiden or boy, the face that always haunted him invariably took form under his chisel. And so, at last, it came to pass that he carved only such statues as you see about you now."

"What became of him?" the matter-of-fact duckhunter asked.

Westfall shrugged his shoulders slightly, and an enigmatical smile played for a moment on his lips.

"It was from another guest of the Barge of Haunted Lives that I obtained the two skulls which you see in these suits of armor," he went on. "The man was a Frenchman, and among his ancestors was one of those vandals who, during the French Revolution, entered the church of St. Denis and, opening the tombs of the old French kings, used royal bones as playthings for a while, and then threw them into a ditch. This ancestor preserved these skulls which, years before, had worn the crown of France. One is said to be that of Henry of Navarre, and the other that of Louis the XI. It was a strange fate that had awaited them all those years, was it not? Above one of these skulls fluttered the famous white plume that led the embattled Huguenots to victory at Ivry. In the other were evolved designs almost Napoleonic in their magnitude—designs that made France the greatest world power of that period, and also caused the French capital to become the centre of the intellectual life of Europe. The brain is gone, but the case belongs to me. The memories of those days at St. Denis so haunted the descendant of the vandal that, at last, in return for a

small service, the last of the unhappy race gave the two deathheads to me."

The young woman was staring, with wide, horror-stricken eyes, at the deathheads.

"But the armor—surely those suits did not belong—" Canbeck began.

"No," said Westfall, "they were not worn by kings. There was a skeleton in each when both were found walled up in a niche in an old English castle that was said to have been haunted. The suits belonged to the period of the fifth Henry."

The single, searching eye of the duckhunter was gazing now at the sarcophagus.

"That," said Westfall, "contains the body of the Princess Tushepu, of the Twentieth Dynasty, who died more than twelve hundred years before Christ. It and the rug—but, enough of this. You will be here for two or three days, and I will relate their stories when you have more leisure to listen to them."

"Two or three days!" exclaimed the duckhunter, scowling. "I'm afraid, sir——"

"Possibly four," added Westfall, thoughtfully.

And now the fair aeronaut spoke.

"You have said that it was your wish that I should meet at this table certain persons in whose history I am especially interested," she said. "Might I ask you to tell me who these persons are?"

"They are those with whom some of the most important events of your life are identified, your highness," Westfall replied, respectfully. "Singularly enough, however, you have met only three of them before."

"But I must know the names of those three," the young woman persisted, as the millionaire paused.

"I beg of you to excuse me from revealing their names until you have seen them."

The young woman turned to the duckhunter.

"Am I right in assuming that I am under your protection, Colonel Canbeck?" she asked.

"Perfectly," replied the duckhunter, composedly.

"Then," said the young woman, "I will ask you to take me from this boat."

The duckhunter turned to Westfall.

"You have my reason, sir, for now wishing you good-night," he said gravely.

Westfall, taking out his watch, glanced at it and laughed quietly.

"Not so fast—not so fast, Colonel," he replied, easily. "If this lady suspected how intimately you are related to her history, and the part that you have played therein, you would be one of the last persons in the world to whom she would go for protection."

The face of the duckhunter grew pale with anger.

"Do you mean, sir, that I am not to be trusted—that I——"

"Oh, no, I do not mean that, but there is an episode in your life, which, being of the greatest importance to her, it is best for her to hear explained before she accepts any favor at your hands."

"You are talking like a madman," exclaimed the duckhunter, angrily. "This lady and I never have met before, and there is nothing in my life that possibly could have any effect on hers, or in her life that could have affected mine. And, if there was, it would constitute no mystery that would be an appropriate subject for one of your busybody councils on this fool craft that you call the Barge of Haunted Lives."

"You are sure, then, that you are not in that category—

in short, that the memory of no deed of yours has haunted you—that, when you sit out yonder watching for wild-fowl, it never enters your thoughts?" asked Westfall.

An ashen pallor overspread the face of the duckhunter, and there was an expression of apprehension in the eye that was turned to his questioner.

"No—unless——" he faltered.

Westfall nodded carelessly.

"Yes—that's it," he said.

With a low, half-smothered groan, Canbeck, still grasping his fowling-piece, turned toward the door.

"Stop," said the young woman, quietly.

The duckhunter halted, and, as he hesitated, the fair aeronaut saw that his head was bowed and that there was a strange, dull glare in the eye which gazed at the floor.

"You are fortunate, Colonel Canbeck, for it would seem that from your past there comes only one spectre to haunt you," the young woman went on. "I am less favored, for I am the victim of many. For months I have been trying to evade them, but they follow me everywhere. Thus far, however, I have been able to identify all, but now Mr. Westfall, apparently interesting himself in my unfortunate history, seems to have found another one. Pray let him explain to us why it is that you and I, who have never met before, must regard each other as enemies."

"Come, come, let us all understand one another better," said Westfall, with some impatience. "As you see, the table has been laid for ten. An hour hence eight men—including you, Canbeck—will sit down together. The ninth place, which, from the first, was intended for you, Madame, will remain vacant until the meal is finished. Then, you, madame, having been served elsewhere, and

veiled in such a manner that you will not be recognized, will enter this room and take the seat reserved for you.

"Of the men present I will be the only one who is not personally identified with your strange history, and among the others there are only two who have met before to-day. Your extraordinary misfortunes are known to me, and during the nights which these men will spend on this barge, each of them will tell a story. Some of these stories will be scarcely less wonderful than those said to have been related by Scheherezade to the Sultan of the Indies, but you will find that all their adventures have direct connection with your own.

"In this room I have heard many remarkable narratives and the analogy of some of them to the stories told by Scheherezade has led me to call them my American Nights Entertainments, but I may safely say that the series which will begin to-night promises to be by far the most wonderful of all, for a remarkable fatality seems to have invested with an almost independent interest all the persons who, either directly or indirectly, have had to do with those concerned with the mystery of the Rajiid Buddha."

The young woman gave utterance to a little cry, and exclaimed:

"The Rajiid Buddha! In Heaven's name is that the man—the man who——"

She paused suddenly and darted a quick, searching glance toward Canbeck.

"I know nothing of a Rajiid Buddha," the duckhunter explained.

"But you have been in India?" the young woman asked, with feverish haste.

"Never, madame—never in my life," the duckhunter answered gravely.

"Colonel Canbeck knows even less of the Rajiid adventure than you do, madame," Westfall explained.

"But you—you do know something of it, then?" the fair aeronaut asked, and, as she spoke, her color came and went.

"The narrative of that adenture is one of those which will be recounted to you, if you will consent to occupy the place which has been provided for you at the table to-night," Westfall answered. "I can promise you that you will find the other narratives quite as interesting."

"I will stay," the fair aeronaut murmured faintly.

"And you, Colonel?" queried Westfall, addressing the duckhunter.

"It is quite unnecessary," said Canbeck in a low, uncertain voice.

"On the contrary, the story that you have to tell is one of the most important of all, for, loth as you may be to tell it, its narration has much to do toward defining this lady's future position in the world. You will, of course, exercise your own judgment in the matter. When, however, you have heard something of the history of the principals in this extraordinary affair, you will appreciate how much depends on a revelation of the facts which are in your possession. You will require no one then to urge you to speak. Until you make yourself known voluntarily, no one will suspect your secret, and I think I may assure you that, when you have told your story, the face that has haunted you will trouble you no more."

Canbeck shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"Well, have it so then," he muttered. Then, after a pause, he added: "But, since you find it so easy to invite the confidence of others, perhaps you will not mind telling us how you found me out—how it comes to pass that this theatrical-looking barge of yours attracts to it so

many men and women of haunted lives who are willing to tell you their troubles for your diversion."

"They do not come here until I send for them, my dear Colonel," Westfall answered, calmly. "As I have told you, persons of this sort always have interested me, but of this interest they are not aware until I tell them of it. My hobby is known, however, to several noted alienists, wardens of penitentiaries, and to city and private detectives in this country and abroad. From these, from time to time, I receive reports of strange cases to which their attention has been directed. When one of these cases excites my interest, I get the principals down to the Barge of Haunted Lives and, after listening to their stories, I do all that lies within my power to aid the unfortunate narrators. In this manner the expenses incident to the clearing up of mysteries have constituted the price I pay for a form of diversion which harms no man who yields it to me. In these matters my curiosity is never idle, but I never betray confidence, even though the man from whom I win it is a hardened, death-deserving criminal."

"Humph!" Canbeck muttered. "Well, you've run me down, and that proves your ability so far as others are concerned, I suppose. But why have you had your barge towed away out here to this forsaken place?"

"Owing to the number of my guests, and certain perils which threaten some of them, I thought it best to keep as well away from the city as possible while they should be aboard," Westfall explained. "While I was still undecided as to where I should send the barge, I learned that you, one of the men I sought, had arranged to come down here on your annual visit to the shooting grounds. Accordingly, I had the barge towed in here last night. The tug that brought it was out of Great South Bay by dawn, so

you did not see it when you came out from Sellersville this morning."

"Well, these shooting things are all I have to wear out here," said Canbeck, apologetically.

"More conventional garments await you in the room which has been appropriated to your use," replied Westfall, laughingly.

As he spoke, the millionaire crossed to one of the walls and pressed an electric button. In response to the summons a young man in brown livery appeared between the curtain under which Westfall had entered the room.

"Driggs, take the Duckhunter to his quarters, and bid Harvette report to this lady," said Westfall. Then turning to Canbeck, he added smilingly: "It is a custom on this barge to give no guest a name in the presence of others until such a time as it may please him to reveal it himself. For this reason, each bears a title that is suggested either by his story or some personal characteristic. Accordingly, while you are known as the Duckhunter, the identity of this lady will be protected by the sobriquet of the Veiled Aeronaut. Among the guests whom you will meet will be the Whispering Gentleman, the Nervous Physician, the Homicidal Professor and the Hypochondriacal Painter. Each you see is——"

"And you tell me that the persons who have suggested these horrible designations have, unknown to me, played important parts in the miserable drama of my life?" demanded the aeronaut, breathlessly.

"Yes," Westfall replied, "and, since these appellations have alarmed you, perhaps it is better that I should not name the others, but I assure you that there is not one among them who bears you any ill will."

"Who is this Harvette you are sending to me?" asked the young woman, suspiciously.

"A middle-aged Frenchwoman, who, being on the barge for such emergencies as this, will be wholly at your service, madame, while you are aboard."

Canbeck, following Driggs, the liveried servant, bowed gravely to the aeronaut and then disappeared behind the curtains. A few moments later a pleasant-faced, matronly woman, clad in black, appeared and led the young woman to a dainty little stateroom which was so well appointed that, despite her forebodings of evil, the visitor was conscious of a thrill of satisfaction. This, at least, was a happier fate than had been indicated while she was confronted by the prospect of a bunk in the Duckhunter's disreputable-looking sloop.

When Canbeck returned to the saloon in which he first had encountered Westfall, a marvellous change in his appearance had been effected. Shaved, attired in evening dress and with carefully brushed hair, he bore himself as easily as Westfall, and had the aspect of a well-groomed man of the world. But the gloom that had settled on his face nearly an hour before was not to be dissipated by the cheerful greeting of his host.

"Well, Colonel, my yacht is in the bay, and one of her boats has just brought the other members of our company aboard the barge," Westfall said. "They will be in presently, and dinner soon will be served."

Passing a hand nervously over his face, the Duckhunter nodded, but made no verbal reply.

They had not long to wait, for soon the sounds of subdued voices were heard outside the curtains, and Canbeck's single, greenish-yellow eye, became suggestive of a searchlight.

"There will be no introductions," said Westfall, speaking quietly. "I will indicate our friends as they come in, however."

Between the curtains there now appeared a figure that caused the Duckhunter, strong-nerved as he was, to stiffen suddenly and contract his brows. It was the figure of an admirably proportioned man, a little under six feet in height. He carried himself gracefully, but his face seemed to constitute a veritable caricature of human physiognomy.

Though his head was well-shaped, his features were so strikingly demoniacal that it was impossible to look upon them without sensations of horror and fear. The lean, triangular face was partly covered by a close-cropped, double-pointed beard which, with a small moustache, failed to disguise the effects produced on the visage by a wide, high-cornered, pointed-lipped mouth, which, even in repose, constantly was expressive of sardonic humor. In singular contrast with this expression was one of suppressed pain which, burning in his large, dark eyes, seemed ever to belie the sinister and unearthly smile that was always present on his lips. Though this singular guest appeared to be no more than thirty or thirty-two years of age, his thick, rebellious black hair was well sprinkled with gray.

"The Sentimental Gargoyle—with the Fugitive Bridegroom just behind him," said Westfall, explanatorily.

As the Gargoyle descended the steps and the guest behind him stood revealed, the Duckhunter saw a man, apparently about thirty-five years old, whose appearance offered a striking contrast with that of the guest who preceded him. Tall, and distinctly handsome, his thoughtful features bespoke a mind ill at ease. His brow was contracted, and he flashed toward the Duckhunter a stern, challenging glance which caused Canbeck to believe that the newcomer suspected him of being an enemy.

"The Nervous Physician," said Westfall, as a short,

thick-set, gray-bearded man, with a quick, fidgety manner, came down the steps.

"The Hypochondriacal Painter and the Whispering Gentleman," Westfall went on.

The first mentioned of these was a tall, emaciated man, past the prime of life, with long, patriarchal white hair and beard. His brow was high and unwrinkled, but on it, and in the large dark eyes below, was an expression of the most profound melancholy that the Duckhunter ever had seen on a human face. Beside the Hypochondriacal Painter walked a man of medium height, with white hair and furtive gray eyes. The skin of his hands and clean-shaven face had a peculiar copper-colored hue. He glanced sharply at the Duckhunter to whom he nodded curtly, then, having traversed the full length of the apartment with quick, nervous steps, he drew out a pair of eyeglasses and, holding these to his nose, he calmly proceeded to study the hieroglyphics which were inscribed on the cartonnage covering the body of the Egyptian princess.

"The Homicidal Professor," Westfall whispered.

The Duckhunter, whose eye had been following the movements of the Whispering Gentleman, again turned toward the curtained doorway through which a stalwart-looking man, about thirty years of age, was passing. In the dark, brooding face and small, curled moustache of the newcomer there was something which caused the Duckhunter to suspect that he was either a Greek or an Italian. The low, deferential bow with which he saluted the host seemed to confirm this suspicion.

All the guests were attired in full evening dress, and, with the single exception of the Whispering Gentleman, all appeared to be too much engrossed in serious reflec-

tions to manifest any interest in their extraordinary environment.

"Well, gentlemen, shall we be seated?" asked Westfall, cheerfully.

"Are we all here?" asked the Whispering Gentleman, in a loud, hoarse whisper.

"There are two absentees, but these will not join us until the meal is finished," Westfall explained, as he moved toward the head of the table. "Of these, one will occupy the seat at the foot of the table and the other will be on my right. A card at each plate will enable each of you to find the place to which I have taken the liberty of assigning you."

All then seated themselves and, while they were being served by Driggs, their host made several attempts to interest his guests in topics suggested by the news of the day. These efforts met with scant encouragement, however. The Nervous Physician and the Whispering Gentleman were the only persons to respond, the others being so occupied with their thoughts and the dishes set before them as to be oblivious to all else.

At length the cigars were reached, and Driggs proceeded to remove the last of the dishes. Then Westfall said:

"Gentlemen, though the eighth member of our company, who is about to join us, is a member of the other sex, she has assured me that our cigars will not be offensive to her, so you are at perfect liberty to retain them. Driggs, ask the Veiled Aeronaut if she is prepared to join us now."

"The Veiled Aeronaut!" exclaimed the Gargoyle, starting.

Westfall frowned, as he went on:

"That is the name by which the eighth guest will be known to you, and our friend's exclamation seems to

make it necessary for me to repeat what I said when you arrived at the Barge. Neither by word nor by sign must any of us interrupt a speaker in the course of his narrative, nor, during the hours that intervene between our sessions, are we to discuss with one another the subjects which have to do with the histories that you have come here to relate. This is now thoroughly understood, I believe."

The silence that followed remained unbroken for several moments, then Westfall, who had turned towards the doorway, rose gravely.

"My friends," he said, "the Veiled Aeronaut is now a member of our company."

Following the example of their host, the seven guests rose, and it would have been difficult to tell whether their action had been inspired by amazement or a sense of chivalry. In the doorway stood one of the most extraordinary figures they ever had seen. Apparently it was the figure of a woman, for the garments were feminine. Through the open front of a long, hanging-sleeved robe of gold and black brocade were visible a red silk waist and skirt. The head was enveloped in a heavy white veil which, falling to the shoulders of the wearer, completely concealed not only her features but the outlines of her head.

For several moments the strange figure paused between the curtains. Then those who watched it curiously saw it sway and move as if it were about to retreat. Westfall, stepping quickly toward the veiled woman, offered her his arm. After a little further hesitation she accepted it, and permitted her host to lead her to the further end of the table where she sank listlessly into the chair that Driggs drew back for her.

Exchanging covert, wondering glances, the other guests

reseated themselves. Westfall, standing at the head of the table, addressed them.

"My friends," he said, "my purpose in causing you to assemble here has been to solve the mystery of a single life, but, in attempting to effect this solution, I have discovered that, supplementary to that mystery there are others in which each of you is individually interested. Into the greater mystery these individual adventures merge like streams in confluence with a mighty river. All become one at last.

"In the course of my inquiries into the subject of haunted lives, I learned, a few months ago, of the case of a bridegroom who, on the very day of his wedding, became a fugitive under most extraordinary circumstances. A secret investigation of this case led me through many strange fields to some of the most remarkable men I have ever known. With one exception, all these men are here, and though, looking around you, my friends, most of you see no face, except my own, that you can recollect having seen before you met to-day, all of you have been working out a common destiny. Even now, as I say this, you look at me incredulously.

"The impression that I am exaggerating may be strengthened at first, perhaps, by the fact that the scenes of the first two tales are so far apart, and the characters so vastly different. However, it soon will be demonstrated that they bear the most intimate relationship. As we proceed, you will observe that the interest of all the adventures which will be described to you will focus on a single object. In the mysterious chain that has excited my wonder every link is a haunted life, and, as the adventure of the Fugitive Bridegroom constitutes the first link I found, it properly will be the first to be sub-

mitted to your attention. With your permission, therefore, he will relate it to you now."

As he finished speaking, Westfall bowed gravely toward the Fugitive Bridegroom, who, leaning with crossed arms on the table, forthwith began his narrative.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERY OF A DERELICT

In describing the events which, in the course of only a few months, have transformed me from a care-free and prosperous young man of the world into a miserable creature whose very soul is pursued by the hounds of fear, I am now, for the first time, taking others into my confidence. Nor would I, even now, reveal the nature of my terrible adventures were it not for the feeble hope that among persons to whom my recital will be addressed there may be one who will aid me in my efforts to put to flight the spectres which, having mocked all my reasoning faculties, have confronted me with one of the most terrifying aspects of Fatality.

All men are more or less prone to superstition, and, being only an average man, I never have been entirely free from superstitious fancies. While I never refused to sit down to a table that was laid for thirteen guests, I never did so without misgivings and secretly reproaching my host for his lack of thoughtfulness. Like Dickens, I always felt more comfortable when I saw a new moon over my right shoulder than I would have been had it appeared over my left. Instinctively I avoided walking under a ladder, and I was loath to embark on a new business venture on a Friday. But I may say truthfully that such fancies were only half-defined and I was inclined to mock them.

I mention this fact because I want to make it clear that, despite the earlier impressions made upon my mind

by my misadventures, I have attempted conscientiously to convince myself that my experiences were the results of natural, rather than supernatural, causes. In the end I have succeeded, but this conviction, so far from affording me relief, has rendered me more miserable than I would be were I satisfied that the causes were of a supernatural character.

My inclination to take a superstitious view of the incidents I am about to describe was due, I think, to the fact that they had to do with the sea. However strong may be a landsman's powers of analysis, awe clouds his faculties when he is called upon to fathom the mysteries of the ocean. He may see, but he cannot understand. He may recount, but it is beyond his power to explain. Natural phenomena which he contemplates on land may result in transient sensations of wonder or alarm, but when he encounters them upon the surging billows above the wreck-strewn floor of the sea his fears rise to the call of abnormal fancies. Bewildered by marvelous effects, he is prone to regard them as supernatural, rather than as the simple working of atmospheric and submarine forces.

The son of a man of moderate wealth, I am a native of Philadelphia, and am now thirty years of age. My father died shortly before I took my degree at Harvard, and thus, when I was twenty-two years old, I found myself with an excellent education and a fortune that amounted to several hundred thousand dollars. Business interests, as well as social inclinations, eventually caused me to become a resident of New York City. There I joined several clubs and soon numbered among my acquaintances many well-known members of society. I remained unmarried, however, and most of my leisure was spent in the company of men who, like myself, were free from domestic ties.

Among my friends there was none with whom I enjoyed closer relations than those which characterized my friendship with Arthur Tallier, a prosperous broker and an enthusisatic yachtsman, who had been one of my classmates at Harvard. When, therefore, he proposed a cruise to the Mediterranean and asked me to be one of the party I gladly accepted his invitation and so arranged my business affairs that I might spend several months abroad.

Arrangements for the cruise soon were completed, and one sultry August morning Tallier's steam yacht, the *Powhatan,* with a congenial company aboard, put to sea.

For two days all went well, but on the morning of the third the *Powhatan* ran into a dense fog. This lifted a bit in the afternoon, but as evening approached it became almost impenetrable and a light rain began to fall. Soon after dinner most of the members of the party went to the smoking-room to play bridge. Having spent most of the day inside, however, and believing a little exercise would be conducive to a restful night, I donned my raincoat, and, accompanied by a physician who was one of Tallier's guests, went for a stroll on deck.

The sea was calm and a light rain was falling. Inasmuch as we were in one of the steamship lanes, the yacht, proceeding blindly through darkness and fog, sounded her siren every few minutes. These blasts elicited no response. Apparently no other vessel was within the compass of their warning notes.

After a brisk walk on the wet deck for about fifteen minutes, my companion and I, having had enough of the drizzly atmosphere, stepped into the wheelhouse. The captain was at the wheel, but was so strangely sullen that we soon abandoned our attempts to draw him into

conversation. At length the doctor suggested that we join our fellow-voyagers in the smoking-room.. I assented, and we bade our inhospitable captain good night.

I had just opened the door of the wheelhouse, preparatory to stepping down to the deck, when a terrific, crashing shock brought the yacht to a standstill so suddenly that I lost my footing at the top of the wheelhouse steps. Falling, I grabbed a brass rail, but some unseen power seemed to wrench me loose and fling me to the deck.

I tried to rise, but the effort was vain. As, succumbing to a great numbness, I sank back weakly, I seemed to be lying on a white-padded floor, with a cluster of arc lights dazzling my eyes with their glare. Hoarse shouts of men and shrill cries of women filled the air as over me bent a shirt-sleeved man, calling off seconds, as I had seen referees do over men who had been knocked down in boxing contests.

Then a great chill came over me, and, with it, a sense of strangulation. As I choked, a roaring filled my ears, but the sound no longer was that made by the voices of men and women. There now flashed into my mind a realization of the fact that I was in water—sinking—that I must struggle for my life. At last my head reached air. I freed my nose and mouth of water, and breathed again. With breath came thought—and horror.

In the darkest night I ever had seen I was swimming alone—in the open sea!

Dazed by the inexplicable nature of the accident that had befallen me, I thought slowly. My first impression was that I was the victim of a nightmare, but this passed quickly. Then it occurred to me that, despite the calmness of the sea before and after the occurrence that was

responsible for my plight, the *Powhatan* had been overwhelmed by a tidal wave, and, still afloat, perhaps, was within range of my voice. Scarcely had this hope flashed into my mind when I began to call for aid.

The great conglomerate of fog and darkness and pattering rain smothered my hollow shouts. As I listened vainly for a response, despair gripped my heart and throat until they swelled with pain. But, mechanically and aimlessly, I swam on.

Stricken with some malady or with a mortal wound, nearly every man, whether strong or weak, meets death with fortitude. Physically and mentally sound, he may advance intrepidly toward a flashing battle line, walk with firm steps to the place of his military or civil execution, or, weary of earth, end his life with his own hand. In such situations death comes with the fulfilment of a purpose—surcease of suffering, the expression of loyalty or self-invited capital punishment. But when a strong man, free from mental and physical infirmity, is brought face to face with death in a situation such as the one which confronted me the most terrible degree of mental torture is likely to precede the flight of his soul.

Though I may say truthfully that I had no fear of death itself, it still is true that the association of my physical strength and utter helplessness produced in my mind an anguish that is indescribable. I felt as if I were to be my own executioner—that, in order to sink to asphyxiation and death, it first would be necessary for me to exhaust deliberately the physical vigor with which nature and my inclination toward athletic exercises had endowed me.

So broad and unruffled were the great, gently heaving sea-swells that I was scarcely sensible of their rise and fall. The water which had chilled me a bit when I was

first immersed, now seemed of Gulf Stream warmth. When I had entered the *Powhatan's* wheelhouse I was perspiring as a result of the briskness of my walk on the deck. Accordingly I removed the raincoat I had been wearing. Leaving the wheelhouse, I had thrown the coat loosely over my shoulders, and when I fell it had slipped from me. So light and loose-fitting were the coat and trousers I wore that they hampered my movements as little as did the tennis shoes on my feet.

Swimming as easily as I often had done at Newport and Palm Beach, I tried to meet with resignation the fate that seemed inevitable. But the effort was vain. Every impulse that came to me, every fibre of my being was in revolt against that God who had condemned me to such a death.

How long I endured this mental torment I do not know, but its end came suddenly. In a moment all my senses were alert, and I was listening for a repetition of a sound that was of neither rain nor sea. It soon came to me again—a faint, creaking and grinding sound that bore some resemblance to those made by a big vessel, which, heaved by large swells, strains at its hawsers and grates against its pier. Scarcely had I begun to speculate on the nature of this sound when I became aware that the air was permeated by something stronger than brine. It was the acrid odor of burnt wood.

Again the blood was throbbing in my temples, and the abrupt reaction from despair to hope produced a feeling of suffocation. So great was my agitation that my hearing was dulled, and for several moments I listened vainly for the sounds that had so affected me. When I heard them again I began to think more calmly, then realized how necessary it was that I should proceed with the greatest caution. A continuance of my ability to hear

the sounds might mean life to me. Should they cease, death was inevitable. By swimming only a few strokes in the wrong direction I might be unable to hear them again.

So impressed was I by the fear that I might lose my sense of direction that I restrained the impulse to shout for aid. Careful to keep my ears free from water, I now, for the first time, began to put power into my strokes. Soon the creaking and grinding and clanking grew louder. That the sounds emanated from some vessel was obvious. Fearful lest it might run me down or pass me, I ceased to press on and shouted with all the power of which my lungs were capable, but there came no answering hail.

Once more I swam on. But now, as I proceeded, I exercised the greatest caution. Certain minor sounds, mingling with those I heard first, plainly indicated that I was within a few yards of my objective. That its motive power was idle was plain. So close was I to the vessel now that, had there been lights aboard, I scarcely could have failed to see something of their glow. The thought came to me that maybe, after all, this was the *Powhatan,* so crippled by the shock it had sustained that its light-generating apparatus had been made useless. Again I shouted—now calling the names of some of my late companions. But there came no answer.

The last of my cries ended abruptly. My right hand, extended in a swimming movement, came in contact with something of rock-like solidity. Half-fearfully, I drew back, and the blood leaped in my veins; then, breathlessly, I struck out to find the rock-like thing again. The effort was successful. In a few moments I was passing one of my hands over a row of rivet heads, set in the steel side of a vessel.

But the thrill of exultation that followed my discovery scarcely was gone before the old feeling of helplessness again settled upon me. My failure to obtain an answer to my shouts, the absence of lights, the motionless screw and the heavy, oppressive odor of burnt wood made the situation clear.

I was swimming beside the fire-scarred hulk of a derelict, and into my mind flashed the suspicion that it was with this the *Powhatan* had been in collision—that this great worthless steel mass had survived the shock that sent the more lightly built steam yacht to the sea's bottom.

Perhaps, even now, the derelict, itself, was sinking, and in a few minutes I might be drawn down by the suction of the waters as they closed over her. But this reflection did not inspire me with fear. It occurred to me that should the vessel go down, I, escaping the suction, might be able to find lodgment on some piece of charred wreckage left on the surface of the sea.

Gradually this series of speculations ceased to engage my mind, which became dominated by the hope that I might find some means of getting aboard the vessel. This, at least, being in a steamship lane, might be observed in a few hours by some liner. If I could find some means of keeping afloat until after daybreak my rescue still was possible.

And now a new inspiration came to me. I reflected that, lightened by the burning of woodwork and cargo, the derelict probably was drawing much less water than she had done before and that, as a result of the lowering of her waterline, her rudder or screw might afford me a temporary resting place. Accordingly I struck out in a direction which, I thought, might take me to the stern.

Swimming slowly along the hull, I had progressed

only ten or twelve yards when my head and one of my shoulders came into contact with something that produced upon me the effect of an unseen, reaching hand. Though startled, I clutched at it wildly. I missed it, at first, but in another moment it was in my grasp—a rope which depended from something above me.

Hope flashed like lightning, but my senses were benumbed by the rumbling of the thunder of despair. Cowardice set me trembling. I dared not test the strength of the rope that seemed to have been lowered to me from the skies. Was the upper end made fast, or was it lying loose? How was it possible that hempen strands could survive the heat of the fire that had swept the vessel?

In a few moments, however, I nerved myself for the ordeal. Reaching well up, I grasped the rope firmly and threw my weight upon it. It met the test.

In my boyhood I had climbed ropes in this fashion, and I soon found I had not lost the knack. With less physical strain than I had anticipated, I moved up evenly, hand over hand, until the rope ended in the blockless iron ring of a davit. I was beginning to breathe heavily, however, as I swung myself astride of the davit, and slipped cautiously to the vessel's side.

Clinging to the davit and the metalwork to which it was affixed, I tried to estimate the character of the footing immediately around it. I found all wood had been burned away and that I stood on the verge of what appeared to be a great void. Below I heard the swish of shifting waters and the creaking of iron as the vessel rolled from side to side on the swells.

The metalwork around the foot of the davit was of a nature that afforded me a safe, if not comfortable, perch for the night, and so, after removing my dripping coat

and my soaked shoes, I seated myself and proceeded to await the coming of dawn.

When day broke, a dismal prospect met my view. With the exception of part of the deck in the stern and a small stern deckhouse, the interior of the vessel had been so ravaged by fire that the structure now was scarcely more than an immense floating iron tank. The cross-beams, reddish and gray, remained in position. Between them, piled upon them or swinging beneath them were great tangled masses of grotesquely twisted steel and fragments of blackened wood. These, grating together as the big hulk lolled on the swells, produced the sounds that first had attracted my attention.

The position in which I now found myself was on the starboard side, well aft, but still about thirty feet from that part of the stern deck that was only partly destroyed. Working my way carefully along the side of the hulk, I had comparatively little difficulty in getting to the stern deck. This, despite its blackened appearance, I found capable of sustaining my weight, and over it I made my way to the deckhouse.

By what freakish combination of circumstances the complete destruction of this deckhouse had been arrested it would be difficult to explain. Though charred inside and out, the walls and roof still remained in position, and within were a table and four chairs, all partly burned. Subsequent speculations on the subject inclined me to the belief that it was here the fire had its origin, and that while the crew was fighting it at this point it had swept forward where it raged unchecked. The drenching to which the deckhouse had been subjected, before the crew fled from the vessel, doubtless had been sufficient to enable this part of the structure to withstand the heat to which it afterward was exposed.

A warm sun contributed in no small degree to my comfort during the day and enabled me to dry my wet garments, but by noon an intolerable thirst began to assert itself. It then occurred to me that, as it had rained the night before, I might obtain fresh water from depressions in the steel structural work. I found a dilapidated pan, and, after considerable labor, I collected enough water to last me for at least forty-eight hours.

There was something so miraculous in the manner I had been able to board the derelict that, for several hours, I did not doubt that eventually I would be taken off by a passing vessel. Firm in my faith, I was depressed only by the magnitude of the disaster that had come to my friends on the *Powhatan,* for that the yacht had gone down I did not doubt. But, as hour after hour passed, my failure to see even the smoke of a passing vessel again unnerved me. Had I escaped death from the waves only to perish of hunger and thirst on a charred derelict?

By nightfall my head was aching as a result of hunger, the glare of the sun on the sea and the overpowering odor of burned timbers. For several hours longer I looked over the star-reflecting waters for the lights of some passing liner, which, though it could not see my signals, still would give me assurance that the derelict was in a steamship lane. But I saw none, and, worn with fatigue and despondency, I stretched myself on the charred floor of the deckhouse and slept.

I was awake at sunrise, and resumed my vigil. And now the monotony of it all began to have a strange effect on my mind. It was difficult for me to keep my thoughts out of ruts. The dominant subject in my mind was the rope by means of which I had boarded the derelict. Why had it not been destroyed by the fire which swept

the vessel? Why was it tied in that fashion to the davit ring, instead of passing through a block?

So engrossed did I become in such speculation that once I worked my way back to the davit and there proceeded to subject the rope to a careful examination. It was plain that it had not even been singed. The thought then came to me that, following the fire, the derelict had been boarded by members of the crew of some passing ship. I realized it would be possible for sailors in a small boat to get a light line over some projection above them, draw up a rope and board the hulk. In such a case, it was possible that, making a descent by means of the davit, the last one down had left the line in the position in which I had found it.

But even the partial acceptance of this theory did not enable me to get my thoughts out of the rut for which the rope was responsible. Try as I might, I could think of nothing but the rope.

Brain-weary and suffering from the pangs of hunger, I was watching the sun go down at the close of my second day on the derelict when my attention was suddenly attracted by something which darted by me—something that seemed to be a black bird, a little smaller than a robin. But, as it wheeled and circled above me, I finally identified it.

It was a bat.

As I watched the thing, it darted toward the forward part of the derelict and disappeared.

So little impression did the incident make upon me, at first, that, for the next two hours, it had no place in my thoughts. It was not until, with my folded coat for a pillow, I had stretched myself again on the floor of the deckhouse that the ill-omened creature fluttered into my

mind in a manner that was productive of a sudden mental shock.

For hours my disordered fancy had been occupied with an attempt to solve the mystery of the unsinged rope. But here was a mystery that was still more baffling. Assuming that the loathsome thing had been on the vessel prior to the fire, how had it contrived to survive the period in which the burning hulk was enveloped in flames and smoke? It had been my understanding that the flights of bats were of comparatively brief duration. Where had this found lodgment while the fire was raging? Had it clung to some piece of wreckage it found floating on the sea? Or had it hung or lain in the charred deckhouse while the flames were consuming the forward part of the vessel?

It was in vain that I tried to expel it from my mind. It remained as firmly fixed as one which, in my boyhood, I had seen entangled in a woman's hair. A thrill of horror passed through me as I reflected that bats were believed to possess the attributes of vampires. I had seen this one sally forth in quest of prey. But what was there in or about this fire-scarred mass of eternally crunching, creaking, wailing steel that could minister to its appetite?

Half rising, I looked fearfully toward the doorless doorway and shattered windows.

And so it came to pass that I dared not sleep. Sitting cross-legged on the deckhouse floor, my gaze wandered from window to window and to the open doorway with dread expectancy.

"It will come back," I kept repeating.

While I waited, a new thought came to me. I rose, stepped outside and picked up a stick which had been lying on the deck. With this I re-entered the deckhouse.

Dread gave place to sleepless patience as I resumed my vigil. But the thing for which I waited did not come.

When darkness melted into the changing hues of dawn I left the deckhouse. With my night vigil ended and my day vigil begun, my weary gaze passed around the great circle of the horizon. No ship or blur of smoke met my view. The craving for food, which had caused much discomfort during the night, had left me now, but the indications of a clear, warm day brought to me new reason for anxiety. Of my carefully hoarded water only two swallows remained.

And yet in the freshness of the morning air there was something that seemed to bring new life to me. My jaded spirit rose with the sun, and I reproached myself for the fears that had been responsible for my sleepless nights—fears which, I knew now, merely had been products of a fancy disordered by hunger, unearthly isolation, the loss of friends, exposure, lack of tobacco and the ceaseless creaking and wailing of the mass of wreckage in the hold.

But how was I to guard against a recurrence of such fears and such a night as the one I just had passed? Then I remembered I had heard it said that the most effective way to free the mind of an unwelcome fancy is to write something concerning it and lay it away. I was inclined to ridicule the idea at first, but it soon made another sort of appeal to me, for it offered a new means of relieving the monotony of my position.

Attached to the chain of the watch which went with me aboard the derelict was a little gold pencil, and in one of the pockets of my coat were several letters. Reasoning that these might serve as a means of identifying my body if it should be found on the derelict, I had dried them and returned them to my pocket. On the back

of one of the letters I now proceeded to write eight rhymed lines suggested by the fears that had come to me the night before. When I was done, I folded the sheet and slipped it back in the pocket from which I had taken it.

The morning was only about half spent when a plainly discernible smudge of smoke on the western horizon indicated the position of a steamship. For more than half an hour, tortured by nerve-racking anxiety, I watched it. It disappeared, however, and with disappointment came mental and physical collapse.

Whether I fainted, or whether, yielding to exhaustion resulting from my wakeful night, I sank into a heavy sleep, I do not know. It was almost sundown, however, when I regained my senses. When I had lapsed into unconsciousness I had been on the deck. Now I was on the floor of the deckhouse. I was coughing, and my blackened skin was hot with fever.

Rising weakly, I went to the pan that had held my supply of water. It was empty. Seating myself on the floor beside the pan, I hid my face in my hands. As my lids closed over my smarting eyes, it seemed to me I was standing on the deck of the *Powhatan,* defending myself against a giant seagull that had attacked me.

I was sinking into a doze when something startled me. As I raised my head all my nerves were quivering. No longer conscious of physical weakness, I rose with trembling haste and crossed to the doorway of the deckhouse. Looking out, I saw that a strange, twilight haze had enveloped the derelict, shutting out even a view of the sea. Then—far, far in the distance—I heard the sullen booming of a steamer's siren.

There was a long interval of silence, then the blasts were repeated, but I was unable to determine whether the

sounds indicated that the unseen vessel was drawing nearer. Four blasts were followed by another long period of silence.

Through long minutes I waited breathlessly. Then the siren boomed again. A fierce exultation possessed me as I realized that, through the haze, the steamer was heading toward the derelict.

Scarcely had the notes of the blast died away, however, when a great chill smote me. From the creaking, mist-enshrouded wreckage in the derelict's hold suddenly issued a long peal of shrill, feminine laughter. Then there rose a series of weird notes, which, at first, I was unable to identify. Finally I recognized them. They were the notes of a concertina.

And soon, mingling with the concertina's strains, I heard the voice of a woman, who, in a dreary monotone, sang the lines I had written on the back of a letter several hours before:—

"You who would fresh water taste,
'Mid this wreckage, warped and torn,
Shall yield to me, before they waste,
A hundred blood-drops in the morn.
When I have had my full desire,
I will supply your every need.
Sweet water then shall quench your fire
And savoury food reward the deed."

The singer ceased. Trembling and weak again, I leaned against the charred deckhouse. Once more I heard the siren's blasts. Fainter now, they were coming from a greater distance. The steamer, unseeing and unseen, had altered her course.

Tottering and groping like a drunkard, I went into the deckhouse and sank to the floor. In my brain Reason and Unreason were in conflict. Reason told me the concertina and the woman I had heard were mere products

of a disordered fancy. But Unreason assured me that they were real and that I must prepare to meet the woman. Mumbling blasphemies, addressed to each, I closed my eyes, and slept.

I awoke with a cry of alarm. Something had struck me lightly on the face, and, as I listened, I heard a faint, fluttering sound. Looking around me, I saw a singular change had come to the interior of the deckhouse, which now seemed rather larger than before. A dimly burning lamp lighted the room, and above a rusty stove bent an aged crone, warming her hands and muttering incoherently. Under one arm she carried a stout staff with which, from time to time, she struck at something in the air. In a moment I marked the cause of the fluttering I had heard. In the room were at least a score of bats.

"Begone, ye pests!" exclaimed the old hag, with vindictive eyes. "D'ye not know Laquella will soon be here? Back—back to your holes, ye evil-eyed devils! D'ye not hear Laquella at the door?"

The words were scarcely spoken when a young woman entered the doorway.

As I gazed upon the newcomer I was overcome by mingled sensations of admiration and fear. She was of extraordinary beauty. Her dark hair fell in unkempt masses about her shoulders. She wore only two garments—a white chemise and a red petticoat which extended to her ankles. Her skin was dark and her teeth faultless. There was something in her expression, however—the lines of her mouth, the unnatural, velvety lustre of her eyes, the abnormal redness of her lips and the cat-like grace of her body—that at once fascinated and repelled me. As she advanced with languid steps into the deckhouse, water ran in streams from the folds of her rain-soaked garments, and she shivered.

"It's bitterly cold to-night, mother," she began, in soft, plaintive accents, as she folded her bare arms across her bosom and drew nearer the stove.

There was a sudden fluttering among the bats that had found lodgment among the timbers at the top of the room.

"Silence!" shrieked the old woman. "Ye black-winged leeches, d'ye not see Laquella is here?" Leering, she turned toward the newcomer and added: "Somebody's waiting, my dear. Ah, it's many a long moon since you have had a lover so strong—eh, Laquella?" And the crone cackled mischievously.

Laquella, giving a little start, faced me suddenly. At first a smile, as of joyous surprise, played about her lips, but, as she gazed, this was succeeded by an expression of fierce, passionate yearning, which, kindling in her wide, lustrous eyes, rapidly lightened her features. Her red lips parted and her bosom heaved as she extended her arms and approached me. Three or four quick strides brought her to where I lay, then, with a little sigh, she sank down beside me.

"See, I shudder with the cold," she whispered, as she caressed my head. "Breathe—breathe on me, dear. Your breath is life—life to me. Oh, God! How chill and lonely it is out here on the sea, which moans all day and night, and talks of death. Draw me closer—closer, love, and warm me in your arms."

Obedient to her will, I drew her to me. For several moments she hid her face on my breast, and I felt her body shake with convulsive sobs. At length she raised her head, and I shrank in terror from the passionate eyes that fixed their gaze on mine.

"I live—I live again!" she murmured. "Already Death's dreadful fingers are beginning to relax their

hold. You are breathing me back to life again—to live —to live for you."

Clasping me tighter in her arms, she pressed her lips to my forehead. A chill pervaded my body, and I trembled violently. Drawing back a little, she placed her frigid palms to my cheeks, and then went on:

"But your hot flesh burns my hands. Your feverish blood——"

She paused abruptly and, with a little gasp, she turned away. Her hands moved quickly to the upper part of my right arm, and I felt her toying with the sleeve of my shirt. Suddenly a twinge of pain darted through me, and as, with exclamations of horror and distress, I tried to rise, I heard a ripping sound made by the tearing of the sleeve. A wild light was shining in her eyes, and, as she forced me back again, I knew the blood I saw on one of her hands was my own..

Panting, and with eager haste, she pressed her cold lips to the bleeding wound. It was in vain that I struggled frantically and bade her desist. My privations had exhausted me, and she was the stronger of the two. I felt my remaining strength slipping away from me. Then I lost consciousness.

Slowly my senses came back to me again. A spoon was being thrust between my teeth, and the odor of broth was in my nostrils. I made a weak attempt to turn the spoon aside, for was not this food the price of blood?

"Take it—take it, lad! Were the hampers of the *Hannibal* so well filled that you have no need of the bounty of the *Highland Lady!*"

The voice was that of a man, and, half-fearfully, I opened my eyes. I saw that I now lay in the berth of a well-appointed stateroom, and that two men were standing beside me. One, clad in a blue uniform, held a

spoon and cup. The other, somewhat younger, was dressed as a ship's steward.

"Is he coming round, Doctor?" asked a quiet, kindly voice near the door.

"Oh, yes, yes—he'll do well enough now," replied the man in the blue uniform, then, again addressing me, he said: "Come, come, man, take this broth and then——"

But I heard no more. The physician who had found it necessary to use force to get the spoonfuls of broth between my lips now was compelled forcibly to restrain me from seizing the cup that held the precious liquid. The doles came too slowly, and I gulped them down like a famished beast of prey. And, as I ate and felt the warmth of brandy and broth stealing through my veins, I realized that the vampire had indeed kept her word and I was saved.

When the cup of broth was empty, I besought the physician for water and more food, but all my prayers to him were vain.

"In another half hour, perhaps, but not now," he answered kindly. "Your stomach is so weak that we must wait a while."

In a frenzy of despair I rose to a sitting posture, and accused the physician of attempting to starve me. Laying a hand on my shoulder, he tried to force me to lie down again. As I raised my right arm to thrust his hand away a violent pain racked my arm and shoulder.

"Be careful, my man!" exclaimed the physician, sharply, and an expression of anxiety came into his eyes. "In trying to fill your stomach, see to it that you don't empty your sleeve."

Half-swooning with pain, I glanced at my arm. Then I saw that it was swollen to nearly twice its natural size and was bandaged just below the shoulder.

Once more the horror of my terrible adventure on the derelict overwhelmed me, and I lost consciousness.

How often I regained my senses and lost them again in the course of the next few days I do not know. Everything around me was blurred. Again and again I heard the fluttering of the bats, but strange voices kept assuring me that the sounds were those of waves and rain. Twice or thrice I shrieked in fear as I saw the face of Laquella at my stateroom door, and often, weeping like a child, I told myself that I was mad.

But there came a day, at last, when the hateful fluttering ceased and the features of Laquella haunted me no more. The faces and words of those who attended me grew more and more distinct. Before, sunlight, moonlight and lamplight had been as one to me, but now I was able to distinguish the difference between day and night. When the change in my condition was brought about, I was lying on a cot in a Liverpool hospital, and I was informed that I had been in the institution for more than a week.

I was told, too, that not once since I had been taken from the derelict *Hannibal,* in mid-ocean, had I been able to speak coherently. My name was unknown, and the captain of the steamship *Highland Lady* had failed to learn from me how it had come to pass that I had "survived the fire that had destroyed the tramp steamer."

I asked the day of the month, and, when I learned this, I realized that two weeks had passed since that fateful night when I stood on the bridge on the *Powhatan.*

In response to the eager questions of my attendants, I described the yacht's collision with the derelict, but I was unable to tell whether or not the *Powhatan* went down. I told them, too, of the manner I had climbed

aboard the derelict, but of my experience with Laquella I did not speak, for I felt now that that incident was nothing more than the product of an imagination distorted by the physical suffering to which I had been subjected.

"But how did you come by that wound in your arm?" asked one of the physicians, when I had finished my story.

"The wound!" I exclaimed wonderingly..

"In your right arm—yes. Did you not know it was there?"

I felt beads of perspiration gathering on my brow, and my limbs began to tremble.

"No," I answered, weakly.

"You were scratched by a piece of rusty metal, perhaps," my questioner said, thoughtfully. "But, whatever the cause may have been, you have had an attack of gangrene that almost made it necessary for us to amputate your arm. In delaying the operation we took a long chance, but the danger is over now, and another fortnight will find you little the worse physically as a result of your unfortunate adventure."

Stricken aghast by the significance of the wound in my arm, I still struggled to assure myself that the injury was, as the doctor had suggested, nothing more than infection resulting from some trifling and unnoticed scratch that I had received while I was on the derelict. But, strive as I would to combat it, the impression made on my mind by the notes of the concertina, by the voice and words of the singer and by the visit of the mysterious young woman to the wrecked deckhouse, continued so strong that I was no longer able to regard these incidents as anything less than realities.

At length, completely cured of the malady that had threatened me with the loss of my arm, as well as the

loss of my life, I left the hospital. From England I went to the Continent to recuperate, and it was not until the following Spring that I returned to New York.

The Summer and Autumn that followed my return to the United States were uneventful. With my health completely restored, I again addressed myself to my business interests, and in the commonplace atmosphere in which I moved romance and superstition had so little place that at last I came to regard my adventure on the *Hannibal* as one recalls the half-forgotten scenes of a nightmare.

About this time a change came over me, and club life began to lose many of its former charms. I spent more time at the homes of my friends, and was frequently a member of week-end parties at country houses, but, though I was finding more pleasure in the society of women than I had found before, no member of the sex had made any serious impression upon me.

Thus it came to pass that I was again pursuing the even tenor of my way, with pleasing prospects and with no past misfortunes to mourn other than the deaths of my parents and the tragical end of Tallier and my other shipmates on the *Powhatan,* when one night in early December, I attended a performance of *"L'Africaine,"* in the Metropolitan Opera House. Accompanied by George Kane, one of my friends, I left the box which we had been occupying with his mother and sister, and strolled out to the foyer. We were about to return to the box when my companion nodded slightly to one of the promenaders. Involuntarily I glanced toward the person who had attracted the attention of my friend. This was a dark-haired, clean-shaven young man of about my own age. His face was long and well-moulded, and his tall, faultlessly clad figure was that of an athlete.

But for only a moment did my gaze rest on this

stranger. Beside him was a young woman—a young woman whose face and figure were, I think, the most beautiful I had ever seen. She was rather above the medium height of women, and her dark hair, coiled in great masses behind her shapely head and neck, seemed by the contrast it offered to enhance the exquisite coloring of her features. Her eyes were dark and singularly lustrous. She was laughing when I saw her first, and her red lips, faultless teeth and vivacious expression would have been sufficient to fascinate an ordinary observer, even had her other perfections been less striking. She was gowned in black and her splendid shoulders and arms were bare. Unlike other fashionably dressed women, she wore no necklace or bracelets.

As the young woman turned her head carelessly, her gaze met mine, but it was only for a moment. She nodded slightly to my companion, and then passed on with her escort.

"Who are they, Kane?" I asked abruptly, turning to my friend.

"Tom Trevison and his sister," he answered, shortly.

"Trevison!" I muttered. "I have no recollection of having heard of them before."

"They're not in society. Old Trevison, several years ago, came from somewhere out West, where he owned some mining property. About a year ago he died. No one ever saw Tom before that, and what he does for a living no man knows. He and his sister live together at an apartment hotel away up-town. They are great music lovers, and it's only at the opera and at musicales one ever sees them. The girl's a stunner, though. It's a pity she doesn't let herself out."

The curtain was about to go up, so we hurried back to our box.

From that night I became known as one of the most assiduous patrons of opera and piano recitals in the metropolis. I soon learned that Kane had spoken truly. Music was Miss Trevison's hobby. I repeatedly saw her with her brother at the Metropolitan Opera House at night, and I was quick to observe that they nearly always occupied the same seats about the middle of the orchestra. In the afternoons I frequently saw Miss Trevison at piano or violin recitals, on which occasions she was accompanied by one or two women friends.

At length, with a fluttering heart, I became conscious of the fact that the young woman had begun to notice my presence at the various entertainments which attracted her. On several occasions I saw her gaze rest upon me for a moment as she glanced over the audience in the course of her search for familiar faces.

Once, while she was conversing with a man whom I knew to be a musical critic for one of the newspapers, I saw the man glance toward me quickly. He looked at me searchingly for several moments, then, turning to her again, he shook his head.

I inferred that, answering a question, he had told her I was not a member of his guild.

Two weeks after the evening on which I first had seen Miss Trevison at the Opera House, I contrived to secure an introduction to her brother. A week later the brother introduced me to his sister, and on the following afternoon I met and conversed with her at a recital given by a celebrated Russian pianist.

I doubt whether, in such a brief period, any man was so quickly subjugated by a woman's charms. At last I had permission to visit her, and the privilege of escorting her to musical entertainments was accorded to me. I became more and more desperately in love.

But, by degrees, there came to be mingled with this love an almost indefinable sense of fear. Strong as I am physically, there were times when the very thought of Paula Trevison set me trembling. What had inspired this fear I did not know. Often I would try to analyze the feeling. Sometimes I fancied it was caused by doubts of my ability to win her, but as, day by day, we became better comrades, I grew more sanguine, and yet the haunting sense of fear became more and more perceptible, taking the form of one of those premonitions of evil which all men have felt at some period of their lives.

One afternoon, in February, Paula and I, seated together in a concert room, were listening to a famous pianist's exquisite rendition of one of Chopin's nocturnes. While under the spell of the music I involuntarily laid my hand on hers. As our eyes met, something in those of my companion caused me to grow hot and cold in turn. In that glance I read the confession of a love so masterful and passionate that I believed it was more than human, and yet I felt that it was no more strong than mine.

That night I asked Paula to be my wife, and, as she gave me the answer that I craved, I took her in my arms. Our lips met, and then—ah, all that followed seemed to be as unreal as the incidents of a dream. I kissed her lips, her brow, her hair, her hands. I saw the half-grave, half-smiling face of her brother as we told him all. But, when he took my hands, I, who was physically as strong as he, was trembling like a frightened child.

When I returned to my apartments that night I tottered like a drunkard, and as I saw my reflection in a mirror I shrank aghast from the ashen features and bloodshot eyes that confronted me.

I asked myself whether I was mad. If not, why should I have walked the floor nearly all that night,

striving to banish from my mind the love-illumined face of Paula Trevison? Why were my heart and mind in conflict? Why was I tortured by sensations such as might come to a man who, having sold his soul to the devil for five years of Paradise, hesitates to enter into his reward?

During the three months that followed Paula's consent to become my wife, my fear that I was losing my reason became so great that at length it virtually amounted to a conviction. In her presence I was always a passionate and devoted admirer, but no sooner did I leave her than I reproached myself because of my inability to keep away from her—to thrust her out of my life.

It was arranged that we should be married in June, and that after the ceremony we should embark for Europe where our honeymoon would be spent. In accordance with this plan, a little party of our friends assembled in a Harlem church one morning and in their presence Paula Trevison became my wife. An hour later we entered a limousine and in this we set off for the pier to which our luggage had been taken the day before.

For several moments after entering the vehicle we sat in silence, with Paula's hand clasped in mine. Then I observed that my wife was looking at me curiously. At length, laughing a little uneasily, she spoke.

"It seems so strange, dear, that you should be more nervous than I this morning," she said. "Are you not well?"

There was a note of reproach in her voice, and, as she attempted to withdraw the hand I held, I grasped it more tightly.

"I am well enough," I answered, "but I thought the ceremony would never end, and, after it was over, every one, in offering congratulations, seemed to say something

to which I had replied before. I am afraid that the difficulty I found in giving variety to my replies made me irritable."

"Well, you looked positively haggard," said Paula laughingly, "and, when I saw you so, I began to see in your face something that gave me the impression that we had met somewhere before—a long time before you first saw me on that night in the Opera House."

"That we had met before!" I muttered. "Had we met before I think I surely would have remembered it."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It is no more than a mere fancy of mine, I suppose," she said.

We rode on in silence, but there had been something in her words that changed the current of my thoughts, and I asked myself whether, after all, it was not possible that we had, indeed, met before.

We arrived at the pier at last, and, alighting from the limousine, we quickly crossed the gangplank and made our way to the stateroom I had engaged. This was on the promenade deck, and immediately after entering I proceeded to open the window in order to admit the air.

Thinking that some of our friends might have decided to come to the pier to see us off, I left Paula in the stateroom, and strolled out on the deck. As I looked over the rail I saw a large crowd of Italians who, apparently, had assembled to bid farewell to some of their fellow-countrymen in the steerage.

At length I saw a couple of waving arms and I recognized Paula's brother and one of his friends. They quickly shouldered their way through the crowd, but just as they reached the foot of the gangplank an officer motioned them back. A moment later cries of "All off for the shore" were echoing through the vessel, and the men

who had been standing beside the great posts over which the hawser loops were thrown began to manifest signs of activity. The time for sailing was at hand.

Waving my hands toward my friends on the shore, I hurried back to the stateroom for Paula. As I paused at the door, I saw she had removed the hat she had worn on the way to the pier and that she was now putting on a Tam-o' Shanter.

I was about to speak when the sounds of Italian voices crying *"addios"* came to my ears through the open window. The cries ceased as suddenly as they had risen, and then I heard a sound that caused me to start violently. As I listened, Paula turned toward me.

The sound I heard was that of a concertina!

What Paula saw in my face just then I do not know, but, pallid and trembling, she retreated a step or two and gazed at me with wide, wondering eyes.

The thrill of horror that passed though my body caused me to shiver. There was a strange, tickling sensation on my scalp and my hair felt as if it was rising.

The notes of the concertina had broken the spell that had kept my memory dormant. All was clear to me now. I knew how it had come to pass that I had been led to fear the woman I had made my wife. The woman to whom I had given my love and name was Laquella—Laquella, the vampire of the derelict!

In a voice that was so hoarse with emotion that it did not seem to be my own I said:

"Your suspicion was well-founded, madame. The meeting in the Opera House was not our first."

Shrinking further from me, she murmured, with trembling lips:

"Yes—yes. I remember now. You are——"

With a groan of horror and anguish, I turned from the

room and closed the door behind me. From the decks and the depths of the great vessel there still came the mournful cry of the stewards:

"All off for the shore."

Moved by a sudden impulse, I dashed down the companionway that led to the deck below. There I found that several seamen already were beginning to run the gangplank from the vessel. I called to them to pause, and then shouldered my way past them. A few moments later I was on the pier.

As I hastened toward the street, I heard a man's voice call my name. Looking over my shoulder, I saw the white face and wonder-stricken eyes of Paula's brother. I quickened my steps and before he caught up with me I was in a taxicab. In accordance with my quickly spoken instructions, the chauffeur started in the direction of an uptown hotel. Within five minutes I was satisfied that I had shaken off my pursuer.

As soon as I was assured of my success in eluding Paula's brother, I hastened to the office of my lawyer. Though I had given no thought to the matter at the time of my mad flight from the ship, I afterward recollected that my wife was provided with sufficient funds to enable her to return to the United States. I directed my lawyer, however, to cable to one of his English correspondents to meet the vessel on its arrival at Liverpool and to render my wife whatever assistance she might require. In addition to this, I placed a large sum to Paula's credit in a New York bank, and caused her brother to be informed of my action.

More than four months have passed since then, and, during this period my wife and I have not met, nor have we, either directly or indirectly, been in communication. The first two months I spent in the West, and, with the

single exception of my lawyer, none of my friends knew my address. Returning then to the East, I took passage for Europe. There I remained until two weeks ago.

I have learned that my wife embarked for New York immediately after her arrival in Liverpool, but neither she nor her brother has made an attempt to find me. The money which I placed to Paula's credit in the bank has remained untouched.

In conclusion, I will say that, since my flight from my wife, there has been scarcely an hour of the day or night, except when sleep has given me a respite, that my mind has not been occupied with attempts to find some comforting solution to the mystery which partly cloaks the incidents that have wrecked my life. For several weeks I could not free myself from the impression that I was the victim of supernatural agencies. Now, however, I am satisfied that Paula Trevison, perhaps half-crazed by privations similar to mine, was on the derelict at the time that I found refuge there, and that she had as a companion the old crone whom I heard address her as Laquella. How they came there, only Heaven knows, but you will recollect that I have told you that I got aboard the *Hannibal* by means of a rope that hung over the side. That rope was of hemp, and it is obvious that it must have been fastened to the davit after the fire had swept the vessel. This fact indicates that, subsequent to the fire on the *Hannibal,* and prior to the sinking of the *Powhatan,* the derelict was boarded, either by persons who had put off in boats at the time of the fire or by others. It was, of course, impossible for a woman to get aboard as I did by means of this rope, but it is natural to infer that the rope was used for the ascent and descent of a seaman who may have belonged to a party that had a rope ladder. In that case the ladder doubtless was taken

away in the boat that had brought it, and the rope was left hanging from the davit.

Convinced, then, that the woman I have wed is none other than that Laquella, who whether mad or sane, inspired me with horror on the derelict *Hannibal,* I am resolved to avoid as much as possible every town in which I believe her to be. I do this because I fear that, if we were to meet again, the love with which she once inspired me would triumph over every principle that is allied with my self-respect, for in her presence I would have to combat one of the most potent spells which the beauty of woman ever cast over the heart of man.

As the Fugitive Bridegroom finished his story, the Nervous Physician leaned forward.

"Are we to understand that, since your recovery from the effects of your privations, you have had no communication with the captain or other officers of the *Highland Lady?"* he asked.

"I have not seen or communicated with any of them."

"But you have some reason to know that you were the only person taken off the derelict?"

"Yes. The newspapers published the captain's story before my identity was known. I was the only person rescued from the *Hannibal."*

The Homicidal Professor was the next to speak.

"And you are quite certain that, prior to the loss of the *Powhatan,* you had not seen the young woman who is now your wife?" he asked.

"Of that I am certain," the Fugitive Bridegroom replied in a tone of conviction.

The Homicidal Professor nodded and settled back in his chair.

Westfall rose.

"As I have told you, my friends, the story of the Fugitive Bridegroom was the first link I found to this mysterious chain, and it was for this reason that I placed his adventure first. In due time, and in the proper place, more light will be thrown on the incidents which you have just heard described. We cannot look for this, however, in the narrative which we are about to have from the Whispering Gentleman—a narrative which properly may he said to introduce the principals of this extraordinary affair.

He nodded toward the Whispering Gentleman, who forthwith proceeded in a loud, hoarse whisper, to describe the incidents which had resulted in his appearance on the Barge of Haunted Lives.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHADOW OF NEMESIS

In the insane asylums of the United States there are, at this hour, hundreds of persons who are no more mad than are men and women who, having witnessed one of the entertainments of some modern exponent of the art of legerdemain, soberly describe to their friends the acts that have excited their wonder.

No man who describes the impressions made upon him by Hermann or Kellar is suspected of lunacy. But when such impressions are produced by some event or events in everyday life, the minds which receive them are thought to be abnormal.

It was in consequence of an experience of this sort that, several months ago, I became an inmate of a sanitarium for the insane. In that institution I doubtless should have been to-day had it not been for the fact that its superintendent suddenly discovered that he, too, was being threatened by the same mysterious force which, tightening its grip on me, had caused me to be regarded as a madman. This discovery resulted in my release from the asylum; but since I left its walls my peril has been doubly great—so great, indeed, that the final catastrophe may confront me at any moment.

Though my hair is white, and my hands are as palsied as those of a nonogenarian, I am entering only my forty-third year. Two years ago my hair was as black as it had been during the period of my youth, and, as a result

of several extended periods of travel, on foot and horseback, in different parts of the world, I was the possessor of an excellent physique.

My fondness for travel was developed at an early age, and shortly after taking my degree at a well-known university I became a member of the Geographical Society. I inherited a small fortune from an uncle and, in a modest way, made a cruise among the South Sea Islands, and to the East coast of Africa. There I joined a French exploring expedition, with which I went through the territory lying between Zanzibar and Victoria Nyanza. For the next ten years I found employment with expeditions sent to remote sections of the world by universities and learned societies in search of ethnological, zoological, archeological, and botanical information.

In this manner I was able to indulge my taste for travel without drawing to any great extent on my private income. The credit of all my work has gone to those who employed me, and there are at least half a score of authors of popular books of travel who are indebted to me for much of the data which they profess to have collected themselves. But, loving travel for its own sake, and craving neither fame nor fortune, I was well content.

Shortly after my return to New York from an expedition to the sites of some old Inca towns in South America, I was sitting in my room when my servant brought to me a card which bore the name "Alfred Ferguson," who, I was informed, was waiting to see me. The name was unknown to me, but I bade the servant bring the visitor to my room.

A few moments later my caller entered. He was a tall, long-limbed man, of about twenty-eight years of age. His long face was almost as bronzed as my own. He stooped slightly, and there was a slouchiness about his

clothes and gait that gave to him a "devil-may-care" appearance that did not impress me favorably. His blue eyes were shrewd enough, however, and as, throwing aside the newspaper I had been reading, I met his gaze, I saw that he was looking at me with an expression that was frankly earnest and critical.

"Mr. Ferguson?" I asked as I rose.

"Yes, yes, I'm Ferguson," he replied, half-absently. "You are Forsythe, the traveler, I believe."

His accent was unmistakably that of an Englishman. I nodded and moved a chair toward him. He seated himself deliberately and began to fumble in one of the pockets of his coat. From this he drew a cigar-case, which, when he had opened it, he offered to me. The cigars were large and as black as the skin of an Ethiopian. Selecting one, I thanked him and offered him matches.

Neither of us spoke again until our cigars were lighted.

"Well, now, Mr. Ferguson, what can I do for you?" I asked, pleasantly.

He did not answer at once. The expression of abstraction was still on his face and, as I puffed on the strong cigar he had given me, I watched him curiously. At length, in a voice that was so sullen that the words seemed to be uttered against his will, he said:

"I want you to go with me to India."

"To India!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. We'll start to-morrow—on the *Camperdonia*. If we leave the ship at Queenstown and cut across by the mail route to London, we will be able to get the P. & O. liner that sails to-morrow week."

"Indeed!" I murmured, coldly.

My visitor, apparently discomfited by my tone, looked at me anxiously.

"You have nothing else on, I hope," he said, shortly.

"Why, no—nothing in the way of a business engagement," I replied. "But, before I take under consideration the proposition you have just made, I must, of course, know something of the purpose of the journey."

"I will explain it," he replied, promptly. "You have been in India, I believe."

"Yes," said I.

"While there did you visit the district of Nauwar?" he asked.

I told him I had not done so.

"In that district is a village named Rajiid," he went on.

"I have heard of it," I said. "It is there, I believe, that the statue known as the Eyeless Buddha is to be found."

My visitor looked at me coldly for several moments.

"True," he replied. "It is in the temple of Rajiid that the Eyeless Buddha is to be seen. The village is so remote from the routes of the average traveler, however, that I was not aware that anyone outside India knew of its existence."

"The little knowledge I have of the place was obtained from an old English colonel I met at Simla one Summer," I explained.

"What did he tell you of the Eyeless Buddha?" asked my visitor, carelessly.

"Why, as I remember it, he told me that the statue was of bronze and about a thousand years old," I answered. "It is said that the eye-sockets, which are empty now, at one time held diamonds of great value."

"Did this Colonel tell you how they came to be lost?" asked Ferguson.

"They disappeared at the time of the Indian Mutiny," I replied. "This, I think, constitutes all the information which I have concerning Rajiid and the Eyeless Buddha."

Ferguson nodded, compressed his lips slightly, then rose and crossed to one of the windows. As he looked out, I watched him curiously.

There was something in the aspect of my visitor that impressed me more and more unfavorably, and I was attempting to formulate some excuse for my inability to undertake the journey he had proposed when he turned to me suddenly.

"Well, Mr. Forsythe, the situation is this," he began. "In Rajiid there are certain articles of exceptional archeological interest that I want to acquire.. I doubt not that these may be purchased readily and removed from India by a man who already is known as a collector of such objects for institutions of learning. In India there is no law prohibiting the removal of art objects from the country, as there is in Italy, but in order to acquire certain of these it is often essential first to obtain the approval of the proper authorities. These authorities, in India, are known to you, and, in view of the distinction which you have won as a collector, they doubtless would grant to you privileges which it would be idle for me to seek."

"You have been in Rajiid?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "Not only have I not been in Rajiid, but I have never set foot in India."

"And yet you have reason to believe that this obscure village possesses objects of exceptional interest," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders, and, for the first time since he had entered the apartment, I saw him smile.

"Yes," he answered. "If you will aid me in getting possession of these objects, you will be well paid for your trouble."

"Ah, it is a speculative enterprise, then!" I murmured.

"So far as I am concerned, perhaps it is," he answered

quickly. "You, however, will be sure of your reward. The task will occupy less than three months. If you will give me your services for that period, I will pay you ten thousand dollars to-day. Besides this I will place a like amount in a package which I will deliver to you with the understanding that you put it in a safe-deposit vault to which I am to have a duplicate key. You will not tell me, however, where this vault is to be found."

"Why, then, do you require the key?" I asked suspiciously.

My visitor shrugged his shoulders.

"It may be that you will lose yours," he replied, with a little laugh. "It is not well to carry all one's eggs in the same basket, you know."

"What is your purpose in leaving the ten thousand dollars with me?" I inquired.

"It will be yours when our work is done," he answered.

"You are willing to leave it in my care with nothing more than a verbal understanding?" I asked wonderingly.

"I trust you implicitly," said he. "Your reputation is well known to me. I require no better evidence of your good faith than that. Are the terms I propose satisfactory?"

I was thoroughly interested now. The enterprise promised to be more remunerative than any in which I had engaged, but it was not this fact that appealed to me so much as the nature of the adventure itself. There was something in the personality of my visitor, too, that now excited my curiosity.

"Well, Forsythe, what do you say?" he asked, as I hesitated.

I rose and for several moments I thoughtfully paced to and fro.

"In short, then, it is your design to try and recover the gems which formerly constituted the eyes of the Rajiid Buddha," I muttered.

"I have not said so," he answered, coldly. "My object in seeking your services has been pretty clearly stated, I think. Your purpose will be to secure and bring out of India certain articles, possessing archeological interest, which, from time to time, I will indicate."

"I see," I answered shortly.

"You will accompany me, then?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"And you will be prepared to sail on the *Camperdonia* to-morrow?"

"Yes."

He nodded.

"The vessel sails at noon," he said.

Then, thrusting a hand into an inside pocket of his coat, he drew out a package and continued:

"In this package you will find banknotes amounting to fifteen thousand dollars. Of this sum, ten thousand belongs to you. The other five thousand will defray the cost of your trip from New York to Bombay, Rajiid and thence to Bombay again."

Placing this on the table, he drew from his pocket a second package.

This, he explained, contained the second ten thousand dollars which were to be mine on my return from India. He made me count the banknotes, and, as these were of large denominations, the task soon was completed. They amounted to the sum he had named.

In accordance with his instructions, I was about to put the package in a box, which I took from my desk, when he asked me to slip into the box a little cylindrical parcel, about six inches long and three inches in diameter. With-

out questioning him as to the nature of the contents of the parcel, I did as he requested. The box containing the second ten thousand dollars and the parcel was then wrapped in a heavy piece of brown paper. When this had been securely tied, Ferguson produced a stick of sealing-wax and, sealing the knot and the sides of the little bundle, he pressed a seal-ring to the soft wax. When he had finished, he smiled gravely and placed the bundle in my hand.

"Upon our return I will ask you to deliver to me, unopened, the parcel I have enclosed with the money," he said. "It is only a trifle, but, as it is all I am leaving behind, I will be extremely obliged if you will see that it is cared for."

I told him that I would place the bundle in a safe-deposit vault, and would let him have a duplicate key on the following day.

"No, you will not do that," he replied with a little laugh. "We will not meet again until we are in India. Put the key in an envelope and address it to me at my hotel—the Claymore. A district messenger will deliver it."

"But are we not to sail together on the *Camperdonia* to-morrow?" I asked with some surprise.

"Both of us will sail on the *Camperdonia;* but, in order that even chance may not bring us together, you will go in the first cabin, and I will go in the second. It is scarcely likely that you will see me during the voyage. When you disembark at Queenstown, do not try to assure yourself that I am among those who, like you, will take the train and boat to Holyhead. Your movements must be entirely independent of mine. When you get to London, secure first-class passage by the P. and O. liner *Arran* for Bombay. Though I will also be on the vessel, it is altogether

probable that you will not see me. Before we arrive at our destination, however, we will be in communication."

He held out his hand, and, as I took it, he bowed gravely.

"Bon voyage," he said, with a smile. And a few minutes later I was alone, pondering over my strange commission.

I began at once to make preparations for my departure. One of my first acts was to deposit in a bank the ten thousand dollars that had been advanced to me, and to place in a safe-deposit box the package that had been sealed by my visitor. I obtained two keys to the box, and, placing one of these in a pocket-book that I intended to take with me on my trip, I sent the other by a messenger to the Claymore. My other preparations for the journey, including the purchase of my steamship ticket, were completed by nightfall.

It is unnecessary to relate any of the incidents of my voyage to England, for none of these had any bearing on the mission on which I had set out. Only once during that voyage did I find any evidence of Ferguson's presence on the vessel. This was about ten o'clock at night, on our third day out. On this occasion I saw him standing alone on the moonlit deck, in the second cabin section. As he turned to go below our glances met for a moment, but he vouchsafed no sign of recognition.

Upon disembarking at Queenstown I saw my employer on the tender which was to take us to the shore, but he was then looking in another direction, and, in order to avoid him, I went aft. Though he doubtless was on the train that carried me through Ireland, I did not see him, and it was in vain that I looked for him on the boat that took me from Dublin to Holyhead, and on the train from Holyhead to London.

The following day found me aboard the *Arran,* bound for Bombay. On the second day out I became acquainted with Frank Blakeslee, a young Englishman. He was an affable sort of chap, and though he, rather than I, made the advances which resulted in our almost constant companionship, I soon discovered that he had little disposition to become acquainted with other passengers.

Moved by a curiosity which I found to be irresistible, I made several quiet attempts to learn whether Ferguson was on the ship. As was the case on the *Camperdonia,* his name did not appear on either the first or second cabin lists, and, despite the instructions he had given to me, I once went so far as to stroll through the second-cabin saloons and smoking-room in an attempt to reassure myself concerning his presence on the vessel. All efforts to get a trace of him were vain.

It was not till we had passed through the Suez Canal that all my doubts were set at rest. Then the revelation of Ferguson's presence came to me in a manner and from a source so wholly unexpected that the intelligence fairly staggered me.

I was walking the deck shortly before luncheon, when I saw Blakeslee approaching me. His face was grave, and I observed at once that there was a nervousness in his manner that I had not remarked before.

"What is the matter, man?" I asked. "Is this heat knocking you out?"

He muttered two or three words incoherently, and glanced quickly to right and left, as if to assure himself that we were alone. Then, pausing beside me, he said in a low voice:

"Ferguson won't join us at Bombay. We'll have to look for him at Aurungabad."

I gave a start, and looked at him wonderingly.

"Then you know that——" I began.

"Yes, yes—I know everything," he said, interrupting me impatiently.

"Is anything wrong?" I asked apprehensively.

"Yes—no," he faltered. "Well, there's a Hindu aboard who has just committed suicide. They'll be dropping him overboard presently, I suppose."

There was something in his manner—in his increasing nervousness and in his eyes, which were gleaming with excitement, that caused a feeling of foreboding to steal over me.

"Ferguson is aboard?" I muttered.

"Oh, yes—he's aboard," Blakeslee said, dryly, as he turned away.

When I found myself again alone I fell to wondering whether the dead Hindu had been a friend or an enemy of Ferguson's. That he was either the one or the other I did not for a minute doubt.

I did not see Blakeslee again that day. From a steward I learned that his meals were being served to him in his room. It soon became apparent that if, indeed, a Hindu had committed suicide on the vessel, the fact was being guarded as a secret.

We were then in the Red Sea, and the day was, I think, the most sultry I had ever known. Only after nightfall did the passengers go out on deck. When I turned into my berth, about ten o'clock, I soon found the atmosphere of my stateroom so stifling that it was impossible for me to sleep.

About eleven o'clock I rose, donned a light linen suit and went out on deck. There I found scores of my fellow passengers tossing restlessly as they lay on steamer chairs, and in a few minutes I was doing likewise.

It was well after midnight when, waking from a brief

and troubled sleep, I saw that many of the passengers had left the deck. I rose impatiently and, crossing to the rail, I leaned over it and gazed down at the water. I had been in this position for several minutes when I heard the sounds of low voices and shuffling feet on the deck below. Suddenly these were stilled, and I saw a dark object being thrust slowly over the rail of the deck.

In a moment the significance of the situation became clear to me. The body of the dead Hindu was about to be committed to the sea.

All was over in a few moments. The board on which lay the shotted sack, with its gruesome burden, was soon run out. There was a splash—a little trail of bubbles moving swiftly astern, to be lost in the white wake of the vessel, and the thing was done. None of the other passengers on the deck on which I stood was aware of the fact that a sea burial had now become one of the incidents of the voyage.

It was not until the following afternoon that I again met Blakeslee, who, on this occasion, greeted me with much of his former cheerfulness.

"Well, how is our friend to-day?" I asked quietly, after we had exchanged a few commonplace remarks.

An expression of sullenness crossed his face as he answered shortly:

"I don't know."

"You haven't seen him since yesterday?" I persisted.

"I have not seen him since we came aboard the *Arran*," he replied.

"But—well, then, how did you know about that Hindu they buried last night?" I asked.

"Because it has been one of my tasks to watch all Hindus on this vessel, and it has been no easy matter, I assure you. There are more than thirty of them, but I

think the one that died yesterday was the only one we had to fear."

For several moments neither of us spoke. I was the first to break the silence.

"Are we likely to encounter others whom we will have to—fear?" I asked.

Blakeslee laughed unpleasantly.

"I'm afraid we won't be altogether popular with some of the natives of the country," he answered. "Still, I don't think there is much that we really will have to fear. So long as we are successful in our attempts to prevent the brown men from learning the nature of our business, I daresay there will be no trouble."

"Well, if you and Ferguson are as successful in keeping that secret from those fellows as you are in your efforts to keep it from me, there is little doubt that all trouble will be averted," I said gravely.

Blakeslee shrugged his shoulders.

"Everything will be made clear to you soon enough," he answered, abstractedly. "The task that confronts us is comparatively simple, and I doubt not that Ferguson has explained to you all that it will be necessary for you to know in order that you may act intelligently. He wishes you to purchase, and to get out of India, certain articles that appear to have little intrinsic value, but which natives may try to prevent us from taking away."

"Our quest may prove hazardous, then," I said.

"Oh, yes," Blakeslee answered, cheerfully, "it is likely to prove quite hazardous, but, from what I have heard of you, Mr. Forsythe, I should infer that you are scarcely likely to balk at it for that reason."

"I am not inclined to balk at it," I retorted, "but, like most men, I prefer meeting danger in the light rather

than in the dark. A man always fights better when his enemies and their methods are known to him."

Blakeslee was silent for several moments, then, with a sigh, he said:

"Well, Forsythe, India is a remarkable country, and some of its people have peculiar mental qualities which enable them to do strange things. That there is something concerning our enterprise that Ferguson has not told you, I will not deny. Though he has implicit confidence in you, he has excellent reasons for withholding the secret from you. In your own interest, as well as his and mine, it is best that you should not know it now. Believe me, if that knowledge was yours it would be difficult for you to keep from revealing it to those persons from whom we have most to fear."

Despite a natural feeling of resentment, I affected to treat the matter lightly, and the conversation soon turned to other subjects.

The city of Bombay was in sight before I received the promised communication from Ferguson. This came to me through Blakeslee, who, entering the stateroom in which I was packing my things, said in a low voice:

"I met Ferguson last night, and I am afraid we have plenty of trouble cut out for us. He will not accompany us to Rajiid."

"He will not?" I exclaimed in a tone of disappointment. "The expedition is off, then?"

"Not at all," Blakeslee replied. "In order to give him an opportunity to precede us, we will remain for three days at Bombay. This will give you time to renew your acquaintance with the Indian authorities, and to let it be known that you have come to India for the purpose of adding to some American museum a collection of Indian curiosities. Make as much stir about it as you like. The

better known you are, the more likely you will be to prove successful in your quest. As I have served in the Indian army, and as I am familiar with the country's language and modes of travel, we may cause it to be understood that you have employed me to aid you in obtaining certain data that you seek."

To this plan I readily assented, and as soon as we were landed in Bombay I at once proceeded to put it into execution.

Except for such incidents as might have befallen other travelers, our journey to Rajiid was comparatively uneventful. It took us nine days, and when we arrived at our destination we found a miserable little town which, having been visited by a plague the year before, had been nearly depopulated by death and desertion.

The temple was easily found, and, as Blakeslee was confident that we soon would get some word from Ferguson, we established our quarters in a dak-bungalow on the outskirts of the village.

With us we had brought eight native attendants, nearly all of whom were Brahmins. We had fourteen sturdy horses, and we believed that two of these would be sufficient to bear away all the articles which we would have occasion to purchase during our sojourn in the village.

We were not long in discovering that, rapid as had been our progress, a stranger, answering Ferguson's description, had arrived at the village two days before and, after visiting the temple, had disappeared. We also learned that he had seemed to manifest little interest in what he had seen.

Accompanied by Blakeslee, I visited the temple a few hours after our arrival in the village. It was a small, unpretentious affair, and a mere glance at the dilapidated structure was enough to convince me that it had consti-

tuted only a small part of the original building. In it, however, stood the idol known as the Eyeless Buddha.

In this figure the founder of the religion which bears his name was represented as sitting crosslegged on a rug, with his folded hands lying in his lap. The figure was of dark bronze, and measured about eight feet from the top of the head to the top of the stone pedestal on which it was resting. The heavy eyelids were partly lowered, and under each was a dark orifice which, it was apparent, at one time had contained some object that was designed to represent a human eye. These empty sockets had given to the figure the name by which it now was known—the Eyeless Buddha. The statue was more crudely molded than many other images of Buddha I had seen, but the sullen features and eyeless sockets of this gave to it a sinister expression which, for a few moments, excited within me a sensation of awe.

Like all temples in India, this had its quota of persistent beggars and fakirs. Among these we distributed a couple of handfuls of small coins, but the money, so far from granting us immunity from their importunities, caused them to thrust their disgusting hands still closer to our faces and redouble their cries.

Apprehensive lest an exhibition of violence would excite the resentment of persons whose favor it was desirable that we should win, Blakeslee and I restrained our attendants, who were preparing to use sticks in an attempt to drive off our annoyers.

Suddenly, however, the clamor of the mendicants grew still. The throng drew back, and from it issued the figure of an old native, who wore a white turban and loin-cloth. His face, almost as brown as mahogany, was partly covered by a scanty white beard. His eyes were deep-set, searching, and crafty.

I had little doubt that the man who thus challenged our attention was a jaboowallah, one of India's miracle-working fakirs, and such he soon proved to be. He besought us to allow him to give an exhibition of his powers, and though we had seen most of the tricks practised by members of his class, we granted him the permission he sought. The tricks he showed us are common enough to all visitors to India—tricks which, though hundreds of thousands have seen them, never have been satisfactorily explained to Europeans.

This jaboowallah was neither better nor worse than a score of others we had seen before. We saw him plant a mango seed, and within six minutes it had grown, flowered, and borne fruit before our eyes. Then we beheld him seated crosslegged in the air, apparently without support, four or five feet above the surface of the ground. Later he placed a ring in Blakeslee's hand. In a few minutes this was dust, then virgin gold again.

When all was done, we gave a few coins to the jaboowallah, and, in consideration of the fact that the payment was rather in excess of that usually given by travelers, we asked him to keep the crowd of mendicants away from us—a task which he performed to our satisfaction.

That night there came to the dak-bungalow a half-naked Parsee. This man gave to me a letter, written in English, and bearing the name of Ferguson. The letter was as follows:—

The bearer of this is Ahmed-Kal, a Parsee, the only person I have met in this sun-baked land of snakes who can be trusted. Communicate with me through him.

The articles I want you to purchase are the brazier and the two green jade images in the shrine. Be sure to land the one with the protruding tongue in the niche near the roof. This must be obtained without fail, and, when you get it, keep a careful eye on it, but do not let anyone suspect that you set any great value on it. Deliver

this to me outside of India, and the ten thousand dollars I left with you are yours.

Offer only a small price at first for the brazier and images. Brahminism has practically ousted Buddhism from this locality and one easily could buy the Eyeless Buddha itself for little more than a song, were it not for the fact that it is supposed that one day its presence here will attract travelers.

I will send Ahmed-Kal to you to-morrow night to learn whether or not you have secured the articles I have named. Be prepared to set out for Calcutta early the following morning. I will not accompany you, and I doubt whether I will see you in India.

Burn this note at once. Do not write to me. Ahmed-Kal will report to me that he has seen you.

(signed) FERGUSON.

I nodded to Ahmed-Kal as I finished reading. He bowed profoundly, but made no move to go. When I asked him why he waited, he replied in a voice which, though respectful, was expressive of reproach:

"The sahib has not burned it."

I quickly held the paper over a lighted candle, but not till the last charred corner of the letter fell from my fingers did Ferguson's punctilious messenger withdraw from the bungalow.

On the morrow I visited the temple again, and had no difficulty in identifying the objects which Ferguson had directed me to purchase. The brazier was about three feet high, and was an admirable example of Indian art.

The two jade idols, both of which stood in niches near the dilapidated roof, were companion-pieces, about fourteen inches in height, each measuring about eight inches across the shoulders. The figures were grotesque, one being that of a big-bellied man, with a diabolical leer; while the other, somewhat similar in design, had an impudently protruding tongue. The grotesque appearance of the images was increased by a large number of cracks, which indicated that they had been shattered and their fragments cemented together.

As soon as I told the temple's custodian that I was a

collector of jade idols, he hastened to remove these from their niches and began to descant on their merits.

"But these are not for sale," I remarked.

"The temple needs rupees, sahib," replied the priest in a soft, insinuating voice.

When I offered twenty silver rupees for the pair he demanded forty. We finally agreed on twenty-five rupees. The brazier I obtained for thirty rupees, and to this collection I added several small bronze and jade images, which I thought might serve as paper-weights for my friends. The priest and I then parted cordially, and several of my native attendants, bearing my purchases, accompanied Blakeslee and me back to the dak-bungalow.

Thus far my enterprise had been successful, and on the way from the temple to the bungalow Blakeslee and I chatted cheerfully, but, owing to the presence of our attendants, the subject of our quest was not referred to.

As Blakeslee and I entered the bungalow, to seek protection from the heat and blinding glare of the sun, I saw a change come over the face of my companion. His features became suddenly haggard, and there was a strange glitter in his eyes.

"Well, Forsythe, for better or for worse we're in for it now," he said in a low voice that trembled slightly with emotion.

I looked at him wonderingly.

"What, in Heaven's name, is depressing you now?" I asked, irritably. "Have we not succeeded, almost without making a real effort, in getting the articles we sought? As soon as we get word to Ferguson that we have carried out his instructions, we will start for home. The letters which I obtained from the government officials at Bombay will assure us safe conduct."

Blakeslee glanced at me half-contemptuously.

"My dear fellow, our fight is just about to begin," he said, thoughtfully. "Neither Ferguson nor I looked for trouble on the journey here, nor did Ferguson fear that you would have any difficulty in obtaining the articles which now are in your possession. To be perfectly frank with you, the value of these is as unknown to me as it is to you."

With a glance toward the corner of the room in which lay, like a heap of junk, the articles I had purchased that morning, I went to the door and looked out. Our attendants were unsaddling and watering our horses at the foot of the hill, and the space around the bungalow was deserted. Turning back to the room in which Blakeslee, with his hands clasped over one of his knees, was sitting on a rude table, I spoke.

"Ferguson is seeking those lost eyes of the Buddha?" I said.

Blakeslee gazed at me fixedly, but did not answer.

"Has it not occurred to you that they may be concealed in the two jade images that our friend is so anxious to obtain?" I asked.

My companion's gaze fell thoughtfully to the floor.

"It has occurred to me, of course," he answered quietly, after a pause. "But I have rejected the idea. I am inclined to believe that Ferguson is using us simply as a blind to cover other movements that he has afoot. The images do not appear to be any more important than the brazier, which, as a mere glance at it will assure you, is not constructed in a manner that will allow it to conceal anything. Ferguson is a pretty clever strategist, and I have reasons to suspect that, before we get through with this thing, we will find that he is trying to attain his object by means of crossed trails."

"What reason is there for crossing trails when my

reputation and the arrangements I have made with the government officials appear to give us a clear course to Calcutta?" I asked.

Blakeslee shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm hanged if I know, Forsythe," he muttered, abstractedly. "Ferguson is a queer fellow, and he's pretty deep. The thing that puzzles me most is the fact that he is in India. For the last two years he has been watched by spies. That was one of them they dropped overboard from the *Arran*. If these two idols and the brazier were the only things he wanted here, why did he not send us to get them, and keep away himself?"

"Well," I began, but he stopped me with a gesture.

"We've got to cut out this sort of talk," he said, impatiently. "We have the stuff we sought, and now the thing is up to Ferguson. If we continue to speculate like this on the subject, some long-eared native, who may be lurking about, will overhear us and the game will be up. The fight's on now and we must make the best of it. Open eyes and silent tongues constitute the order of the day, so we'd better bar the talking."

At noon we had our luncheon. Then, after telling our attendants to rest for the remainder of the day, in order that they might be prepared to take the road before sunrise on the following morning, Blakeslee and I stretched ourselves on our rugs. After a brief period of restlessness I fell asleep.

It was twilight when I woke. Blakeslee was still asleep, and I glanced apprehensively towards where our morning's purchases lay heaped carelessly in the corner, with one of our saddles resting on top of the pile. Nothing appeared to have been disturbed, but I resolved that while Blakeslee and I remained in India one should keep awake while the other slept.

An hour later we sat down to our evening meal, and then proceeded to await the arrival of Ahmed-Kal.

It was nearly midnight, and all our attendants were asleep, when Blakeslee and I, seated within the dak-bungalow, saw by the light of the moon the figure of a native, in a half-crouching attitude, dart towards the door.

"Well?" I demanded, rising quickly.

The man started at the sound of my voice, and, as he looked toward me, I saw that our visitor was Ahmed-Kal. Drawing back a couple of paces, he crossed his arms over his face.

Alarmed by the man's strange attitude, I addressed him impatiently.

"Well, why do you not speak?" I asked.

With a low, sharp cry the Parsee, lurching forward, sank to the earth and, crawling to my feet, he scraped up a handful of sand from the ground and scattered it over his head.

Grasping him by one of his naked shoulders I shook him vigorously.

"Speak, man—your master—what has happened to him?" I demanded.

The Parsee gave utterance to a series of incoherent sentences, then he again crossed his arms over his face.

Again I seized him and shook his shoulders.

"Where is the Ferguson sahib?" I asked, in a threatening voice.

"They've killed him," whimpered Ahmed-Kal.

"Killed him!" Blakeslee and I exclaimed together.

"Even so," moaned the Parsee.

The eyes that Blakeslee turned on me were dilated with horror.

"Dead—Ferguson!" he muttered. No, no, no! This man——"

"Not dead, sahib—not dead, for he still speaks," Ahmed-Kal interrupted.

We looked at the Parsee with expressions of bewilderment.

"You said he was killed?" I suggested.

"Even so, sahib. They have killed him, but he still speaks, and he bade me summon you to come and see the end."

"How the dev—" Blakeslee began.

"There's no use standing here trying to get rational answers from the fool," I interrupted. "Let's mount and follow where he leads."

Our horses soon were saddled. Preceded by Ahmed-Kal and followed by two of our servants, Blakeslee and I set out in search of Ferguson.

As we advanced in this manner, Ahmed-Kal, from time to time, manifested signs of the most abject fear. His trembling, groans and sudden starts at length had such an effect on my nerves that, like him, I fancied, at times, that I saw dark figures flitting among the thickets we passed.

Once a piercing wail, coming from a point about a hundred yards distant from the road, so startled Blakeslee and me that we drew in our bridle-reins with a force that almost caused our horses to go down on their haunches.

"It is only the cry of a jackal, sahib," said one of our servants reassuringly.

Even as the man spoke, we saw a small, wolfish form loping from one thicket to another, but it was several minutes before the feeling of creepiness passed away and our heartbeats again became normal.

At the expiration of a half-hour we came in view of a little grove of trees, among which the walls of a small temple gleamed white in the moonlight. To this temple a

narrow path led from the road by which we approached the place. At the path Ahmed-Kal drew rein. Then, after dismounting, he came to me.

"This ground is sacred, sahib," he explained. "None save uncovered feet may tread this path."

I nodded; then Blakeslee and I alighted and, after directing our attendants to await our return, we commanded Ahmed-Kal to lead the way.

"What are we in for now, I wonder?" Blakeslee muttered. "I've got this trembling fool covered with my gun, and if he's up to any of his Hindu tricks it will be his last, I promise you."

Following our guide, we had gone about a couple of hundred paces when Blakeslee seized me by the arm.

"Look!" he cried.

We were now in a little open space in the grove that surrounded the temple, and, glancing in the direction that Blakeslee had indicated, I saw, in one of the corners of this space, a human figure seated cross-legged on a white cloth. The figure was as immovable as one of those statues of Buddha which are to be seen everywhere in India, and the shadow cast by one of the swaying branches of a tree gave to it an uncanny aspect that chilled my blood.

Blakeslee and I, followed by Ahmed-Kal, moved forward uncertainly.

"It's Ferguson!" exclaimed Blakeslee in a hoarse whisper.

We quickened our steps, and in a few moments we halted before the motionless and silent figure of our friend.

Neither by word nor sign did Ferguson bespeak a recognition of our presence. His face was deadly pale, and there was an expression of stupor in his eyes.

"Ferguson!" I said, in a low, awed voice; and, as I spoke, I was about to lay a hand on his shoulder to rouse him from his apparent lethargy.

"Stop!" he commanded sharply. "Don't touch me, Forsythe. Step round in front of me. I cannot turn my head.

"What's the matter, old man?" Blakeslee asked. "What have they done to you? That fool, Ahmed-Kal, told us that you had been murdered."

Ferguson hesitated a few moments before he replied.

"Ahmed-Kal was right. I have been slain."

"What madness is this?" I demanded, impatiently.

"It is not madness, but truth," Ferguson answered, sadly. "I have been slain."

Blakeslee and I exchanged glances of horror. It was plain that our friend had lost his reason.

"Come, come, Ferguson, you would not have us believe that we are talking with your ghost," said Blakeslee, indulgently.

"No," replied Ferguson, deliberately. "But, to all intents and purposes, I am a dead man. Were I to move my body, ever so slightly, the next moment would find me a corpse at your feet. The fact is, I have been decapitated. Though my head has been completely severed from my body, it has been done in such a manner that, while no human skill can save my life, I cannot die except by my own act."

Turning his haggard face to mine, Blakeslee said, quietly:

"Come, Forsythe, we must get him out of this."

Ferguson heard the words.

"Stop—Forsythe—Blakeslee!" he protested quickly. "Let there be no mistake. Blakeslee, strike a match; then examine my neck and tell me what you see."

With trembling hands, Blakeslee drew out his match-box and struck a match. By the light of this we saw a thin, dark, threadlike line that completely encircled the neck of our friend. From the line there had exuded drops of blood which had trickled down to Ferguson's collar.

With faces as pallid as that of our friend, Blakeslee and I drew back a couple of paces. The silence that followed was broken by Ferguson.

"Well?" he asked.

"It's bleeding a little," Blakeslee replied, speaking thickly.

"It was good of you to answer my summons so promptly," Ferguson went on. "Brief as our acquaintance has been, I was overjoyed to learn yesterday that chance had led you to India and that you were in this neighborhood. I had intended to seek you yesterday afternoon, but, before I could put my plan into execution, I met with the adventure which Fate had ordained should be my last."

As he paused, Blakeslee and I gazed at him searchingly. Was the man mad, or was he playing a part? Were the words he was addressing to us now reaching ears other than our own?

"What was the nature of the adventure?" I asked.

"Having been brought to India by certain business matters," Ferguson continued, "I was tempted to travel a bit through the country. Several years ago I heard a traveler describe the Eyeless Buddha of Rajiid, and tell its strange story. Being in this neighborhood, I decided, a few days ago, to visit the shrine. It did not interest me greatly, and I was continuing on my way when I was halted to-day by a company of natives. These took me before a jaboowallah, who, on the day before, had performed some of his tricks before me at Rajiid. This

man charged me with an attempt to find and take out of the country the lost diamonds which, many years before, formed the eyes of the Buddha. I protested my innocence, but to no avail.

"Professing to believe that I already had found the hiding place of the diamonds, and had obtained possession of the stones, several natives, in accordance with the direction of the jaboowallah, searched my garments, and then subjected me to the most excruciating tortures in an attempt to wring from me information concerning the diamonds. In this attempt they failed, of course; for, though I had heard the story of the lost gems, the idea of attempting to find them never entered my mind.

"At length my captors ceased their efforts, and, after granting me a rest of several hours, they brought me here, where I was again confronted by the jaboowallah. I was compelled to seat myself on this cloth and was told to prepare myself for death.

"Taking a sword, the jaboowallah whirled it several times through the air, and then—then I was reduced to the plight in which you find me.

"Though I felt the blade pass through my neck, I retained consciousness. My head did not fall, and my gaze was riveted on the mocking face of the jaboowallah as he drew back from me. He told me then that, though my head had been severed from my shoulders, I should not die save only by own act—that a single movement might result in the extinction of life. Then, with a devil-like laugh, he told me I might go when or where I listed.

"I replied that, since this was impossible, my only wish was that I might be able to have my friends informed of my death. To this end, I asked permission to send for you, who, as I had been informed in the morning, were

in the vicinity. He hesitated, but finally granted me the favor that I asked.

"Ahmed-Kal, my Parsee servant, was standing near, and I bade him go to you, after I had received the jaboowallah's assurance that no harm should befall you. And I thank Heaven that you and your friend Blakeslee have come at last."

There was a pause; then I asked, nervously:

"What is it you would have us do?"

"Merely report my death to Ormond Dulmer, my solicitor, in London. You will easily find him. You will do this?"

I hesitated; then I turned to the trembling Ahmed-Kal.

"Bid our attendants come here as quickly as they can," I said to him. "They are armed and——"

"Stop!" cried Ferguson. "Ahmed-Kal, stay here."

The Parsee, with a little cry, sank to the ground and crawled toward Ferguson's feet.

Drawing my revolver, I turned toward where I had left our attendants in the road. Then, raising my voice, I called one of them by name, intending to direct him to hurry to me with his companions.

"Stop—Forsythe—fool!" cried Ferguson desperately.

His words prevented me from hearing any response that might have been made to my summons. Giving no heed to his protest, I called again.

The sound had scarcely left my lips when Blakeslee's revolver flashed. For a moment the report dazed me; then, as I saw Blakeslee being set upon and borne down by four or five dark figures, who seemed to have issued from the ground, I raised my own weapon. But it was too late. Before my finger drew the trigger, a violent blow fell on my head. A thousand glints of light flashed before my eyes; and, as I blindly turned toward my

assailant, a second blow felled me to the ground and I became unconscious.

When I regained my senses, I was lying on the spot on which I had fallen. My head was throbbing slightly, and, as I opened my eyes, I saw the moon still was shining, but that the persons who had been around me when I fell were gone. As I started to rise, I was conscious of a pungent, sweet flavor in my mouth, and of a dull pain and sensation of fullness in my throat. My breathing was quick and labored.

Rising to a sitting posture, I saw, only a couple of paces away, the white cloth on which I last had seen Ferguson. He, like Blakeslee and the natives, had disappeared; but in the middle of the cloth lay something which, arresting my gaze, inspired me with fear and horror. Rising to my feet, I moved toward it.

It was the severed head of Ahmed-Kal!

Breathing heavily, I took the path leading to the road in which Blakeslee and I had left our attendants. As I walked on, the sensation of fullness in my throat became more and more distressing. My tongue was swollen, and I was tortured by thirst and hunger.

As I drew near the road, I saw our horses, with our servants beside them. A glance at the little company revealed the fact that Blakeslee was not there.

Turning to one of the natives, I attempted to ask him why he and his companions had not responded to my call, but no sound issued from my lips, and the effort to speak racked my throat.

At length I succeeded in whispering weakly:

"Blakeslee Sahib? Have you seen him?"

The native addressed shook his head negatively.

"The sahib has not returned," he said.

As I glanced at the faces of the natives, I saw that a

strange sullenness had come upon them, and instinct told me they were not to be trusted in an attempt to attack those who had obeyed the commands of the jaboowallah. Accordingly, I mounted my horse and, with my attendants, returned to the dak-bungalow.

In the bungalow I found things in the same order in which I had left them. Despite my hunger, the condition of my throat made it impossible for me to swallow anything else than biscuits soaked in beef-tea. When this meal was finished, physical and mental exhaustion compelled me to lie down before I had succeeded in formulating any definite plan for the morrow. I knew that there was no English-speaking official within forty miles of me, and it was doubtful whether, in my present condition, I could accomplish such a journey over rough Indian roads in less than a couple of days.

Scarcely had I lain down when one of my servants appeared.

"Will the sahib leave Rajiid before sunrise?" he asked.

"No," I whispered. "We will wait."

The man left the room, and I composed myself for sleep. I had just sunk in a troubled doze, however, when I was aroused by someone who was shaking me gently. As I opened my eyes, I saw, by candlelight, the face of the jaboowallah, who, as I had good reason to believe, was responsible for the misfortune that had befallen my friends and myself.

"The sahib need not rise," said the jaboowallah gravely.

But, giving no heed to his words, I sat up on the blanket on which I had been lying.

"What are you doing here?" I demanded in a whisper that caused my throat to throb with pain.

"I have come to the sahib to warn him," my visitor replied. "If he returns to his own country at once, no

further evil will come to him; but if he tarries in India, or causes the white king's soldiers to come to Rajiid, he must die; and it is as easy for the holy men to kill him in Calcutta as it is to kill him here."

"Where is my friend—Blakeslee Sahib?" I asked.

"He attempted to slay those who had punished one who came to us to desecrate our shrines—to take from us a priceless stone which did not belong to him."

"You miserable murderer—" I began, but, with hardening features, the jaboowallah interrupted me.

"It was an evil hour that the man who came to steal learned that Forsythe Sahib and his friend were traveling here," he said. "But now Forsythe Sahib must go his way alone, nor pause, except for rest, until he is on the vessel which is to take him home. He cannot bring the dead to life any more than he can recover that power of speech which has left him. What is written is written, and what is done is done. By sunrise the sahib must be on his way."

As he finished speaking, the jaboowallah blew out the candle that he held; then he passed out of the door.

I sank back on my blanket, and for several minutes I lay inert. Convinced that the jaboowallah had spoken truth, and that my poor friends were indeed dead, I realized my helplessness. I was alone among strangers of another race, and there was little doubt that, in a sense, the jaboowallah had justice on his side.

Ferguson had come to take from a sacred shrine a pair of precious gems to which he had no claim. It was perfectly apparent that he knew the adventure was fraught with peril. He had taken chances, and had failed. With me, however, guilty though I was, the case was somewhat different. The jaboowallah believed me to be innocent of complicity with Ferguson. Why,

then, had he caused me to be subjected to treatment which was responsible for the loss of my voice?

When I had returned to the bungalow, I lighted a candle and, with the aid of a pocket-mirror, examined my neck. There was nothing on the outside of my throat to indicate that it had been wounded. I then had fancied that my inability to speak had been caused by rough treatment after the last blow had robbed me of consciousness; but the jaboowallah, apparently cognizant of the nature of my injury, had told me that my voice had gone forever.

At length, despite my mental turmoil, I succumbed to fatigue and physical weakness, and slept.

Once again I was awakened by a hand that grasped my shoulder, and I saw, bending over me, with a candle in his hand, one of my attendants—the one who, a few hours before, had asked me whether I intended to set out on my journey before sunrise. Before I had time to ask him why he had awakened me, he spoke.

"The horses are saddled, sahib," he said quietly.

"What time is it?" I asked.

"Two hours before sunrise, sahib."

As I looked at him searchingly, his gaze fell.

"Who bade you prepare for the journey?" I asked.

"The jaboowallah, sahib," he answered.

Conscious of my inability to offer resistance to the power that had robbed me of my friends and of my voice, I nodded and rose. Glancing toward the corner in which had been heaped the articles which, in accordance with Ferguson's directions, I had purchased at the temple, I saw that they were gone.

Apparently the man did not observe my glance, for he vouchsafed no explanation, and I asked no further questions.

Before leaving the bungalow I ate more moistened biscuits, and then went out to where the little company of attendants awaited me. These were already in their saddles; and, when I was mounted, all of us moved away from the bungalow.

As we came to the outskirts of the village I saw the figure of a man standing beside the road. Drawing nearer, I recognized the jaboowallah. As our eyes met, the wonder-worker quickly sank to the ground and prostrated himself at the roadside as I rode by. He was still on the ground when a turn in the road hid him from our view.

With the exception of two incidents, my journey to Calcutta was uneventful. The first of these incidents occurred shortly after sunrise on the morning I left Rajiid. Glancing behind me I saw four led horses. The loads borne by three of these constituted, as I knew, the impedimenta we had taken with us to Rajiid. The fourth load, however, was covered, and I asked one of the natives what the pack contained.

The man looked at me with an expression of surprise as he answered:

"They are the brazier and the idols purchased from the priest at the Rajiid temple."

I made no answer, but an hour later I directed the servants to quicken their pace, and for the next four days we moved even more rapidly than we had done on our journey to Rajiid.

The second incident occurred three days before my arrival at Calcutta. Ever since landing in India I had kept a diary in which I had recorded briefly each day's incidents, being careful, of course, to make no mention of anything that had to do with the real object of my journey. On the day I have mentioned, I just had fin-

ished making an entry when an official returned to me my passport, which he had visèd. The date on this was the twenty-seventh of the month, while the entry I had made in the diary was dated the twenty-fifth. I called the man's attention to what I then believed to be his error. He smiled and shook his head.

"It is the twenty-seventh, sir," he said.

I bowed, and he left me. Turning over the pages of the diary, I was unable to find that I had made a mistake in dating the entries; then an idea occurred to me, and I turned to one of the two attendants who had accompanied me all the way from Rajiid.

"How long was I with the jaboowallah?" I asked abruptly.

"For two days the sahib was in the priest's house near the temple," the man replied. "On the second night the sahib was placed in the same position in which he fell, and the jaboowallah bade us retire and wait for the sahib in the road."

I attempted to question him further, but he was so reticent that I learned little more. The next day he and his companion, who had been at Rajiid, deserted me. For the remainder of the journey I was attended only by servants I had picked up on the way to Calcutta.

Immediately after my arrival at Calcutta, I hastened to an English physician and bade him examine my throat. As he did this, I saw an expression of gravity settle on his face.

"How did this happen?" he asked sharply. "The vocal cords have been cut."

A cold sweat broke out on my forehead as I heard his words. Then I told him all. When I finished my account of the misadventures of my friends and myself, the physician shook his head gravely.

"Such things do happen occasionally in India," he said, "but in almost every case it has been proved that the natives have had justice on their side, and the government, assured of this, rarely adopts vigorous measures, for, in the circumstances, they would result in serious disaffections in certain districts. It is better, perhaps, to heed the jaboowallah's warning and leave the country, rather than to expose yourself to new misfortunes in an attempt to have your enemies punished—an attempt which I fear, would fail."

I decided, reluctantly enough, to take his advice, and five weeks later I was in London.

I at once repaired to the office of Ormond Dulmer, the solicitor to whom Ferguson had directed me, and to him I gave a full account of my Indian adventures. Dulmer, who was an elderly, stolid sort of man, listened gravely to all I had to say, but neither by word nor by the expression of his face did he manifest the slightest degree of surprise or emotion. In conclusion, I said:

"And now, Mr. Dulmer, since I have told you all, nothing remains for me to do but to turn over to you the articles I purchased in Rajiid, and to refund to you the ten thousand dollars which Ferguson instructed me to deposit in New York until his return."

The lawyer raised a hand protestingly.

"No," he replied. "The ten thousand dollars are your own. The jade images and the brazier should be retained by you, however, until you receive from me other instructions for their disposition. Ferguson was a peculiar fellow, and was very precise in his methods. In planning to have you get the images out of India, it is more than probable that he made arrangements for some person to claim them of you in the event of his premature death.

Be good enough, please, to carry out his instructions to the letter."

I looked at Dulmer searchingly.

"You do not believe that Ferguson is dead?" I asked.

Dulmer shrugged his shoulders.

"I know no more than you," he replied. "Still, I scarcely think I will open his will until you and I obtain more definite evidence of his decease than is afforded by the testimony of your mutual enemy, the jaboowallah."

And so it came to pass that, a week later, I stood in my own room in New York, gazing speculatively at a brazier and two grotesque jade images that rested on the floor. My decision concerning these was quickly made. I resolved to send them to a storage warehouse where they might remain until some one authorized to claim them should receive them from my hands. Having formed this resolution, I at once proceeded to put it into execution. Accordingly, I locked my door and went to the office of a storage company, where I made the necessary arrangements. It was agreed that a wagon should be sent to take the articles away early the next morning.

I returned to my room after an absence of a little more than four hours. As I opened the door, however, I gasped with astonishment.

The brazier and the images were gone!

Thinking that, perhaps, the storage company had found it practicable to call for the articles that day, and remembering that, as I went out, I had told my landlady that I intended to send the things away, I was partly reassured. I hastened downstairs to the landlady, and learned from her that two Italians had come with a black, unlettered wagon, and had told her that I had directed them to call for the articles.

I reported my loss to the police; but from that day to

this, so far as I have been able to learn, no trace of the articles has been found by the detectives who were assigned to the case.

And now new dangers began to beset me. On the day following the disappearance of the images, I became conscious of the fact that I was under surveillance, and that no less than four men were employed for the purpose. Whenever I left the house in which I lodged—whether I walked or whether I rode in street-cars or cabs—some stranger would persistently keep me in view. These persons, I doubted not, were in the employ of some detective agency that had undertaken to watch and report my movements. Why anyone should find it necessary to spy on me now I could not understand.

I had been in New York only a week when, returning late to my room one night, I found all my effects in disorder, and it was plain that everything belonging to me had been carefully searched. Some of my private papers were missing, tacks had been removed from the carpet, which appeared to have been turned back in an attempt to discover the hiding-place of some paper or other object. Despite all these facts, however, I found the door locked as I had left it.

The next morning, before daybreak, I telephoned for a taxicab, and, entering it almost before it came to a standstill in front of the house, I directed the man to take me to the City Hall. Then dismissing him, I crossed the Brooklyn Bridge, and, for the first time in a week, I congratulated myself that I had eluded the vigilance of the spies. In Brooklyn I engaged a couple of rooms in a modest dwelling-house at which I gave an assumed name.

I remained indoors all day, and at night I went to a neighboring haberdasher's to purchase articles of wearing

apparel, for I had left my room in New York with scarcely more than the clothes I wore.

Having made my purchases, I returned to the house I had left only a few minutes before. I had just thrust my key in the lock, and was preparing to turn it, when a hand fell on one of my shoulders. Turning quickly, I was confronted by a dusky face which was partly covered by a scant gray beard.

It was the face of the jaboowallah of Rajiid!

"The sahib will allow me to speak to him—in his room?" the strange man asked gravely.

He wore a black derby and a suit of dark clothes; and, as I saw him then, he had the appearance of an aged negro.

For several moments I was too overcome by astonishment and dismay to reply.

"As you please," I faltered as I turned the key.

Then, leading the way, I conducted my persecutor to my room on the second floor.

I turned up the gas and faced my visitor.

"What brings you here?" I demanded abruptly.

"I seek the lost eyes of the Buddha, sahib," the jaboowallah answered.

I looked at him wonderingly.

"Why do you come to me?" I asked.

"Because I have learned the Forsythe Sahib has them," was the solemn answer.

Utterly bewildered, I gazed into his burning eyes.

"Not only have the gems you seek never been in my possession, but I have never seen them or heard anyone suggest a place where they were likely to be found," I replied.

"The sahib cannot deceive me," said my visitor, sullenly. "Both gems have been in his possession. One

was in the body of the jade image with the protruding tongue, which the sahib brought with him from India, and the other was in the little parcel left with him by the Ferguson Sahib on the day before he sailed for Europe."

The room swam before my eyes, and for several moments I was speechless. Then, with a trembling hand, I motioned to my visitor to sit down. He remained standing, but I, overcome by conflicting emotions, sank inertly on a couch.

"The sahib has these, has he not?" the jaboowallah asked.

"No," I answered. "The image has been stolen from me, and the parcel is in the safe-deposit vault in which I was directed to place it by the man to whom it belonged."

The face of the jaboowallah grew darker.

"Stolen!" he exclaimed.

"The loss was reported by me to the police, who say they are trying to find the thief," I explained.

My visitor hesitated.

"You will deliver the parcel to me?" he asked.

"No," I replied, "but I will lead you to the vault, and you may take it, if you will."

The jaboowallah nodded gravely.

"Can you do this to-night?" he asked.

"It will be impossible for me to have access to the vault until ten o'clock in the morning," I explained.

"I will be here at nine," the jaboowallah said.

He bowed profoundly, and then, without further words, he left me.

I passed a restless night. In the morning I had breakfast served in my room. At nine the jaboowallah appeared.

I summoned a taxicab, and, accompanied by my tormentor, I went to Manhattan. By ten o'clock we were in

the office of the safe-deposit company. The vaults were in the basement, and to them we at once descended. There, giving a key to the jaboowallah, I pointed to the box I had engaged, and bade him open it.

Glancing at the box as my companion drew it out, I saw that the seals, which Ferguson had affixed to the bundle, were broken.

"Some one else has been here," I whispered, fearfully.

The eyes of the jaboowallah blazed with anger.

"We will see," he said, as he unfolded the wrapping paper.

Within he found a package of banknotes—nothing more.

As calmly as he had taken out the box, the jaboowallah returned it to its place. Then facing me, he said, quietly:

"The sahib does not lie well. If the things have been stolen, the sahib has stolen from himself. Only ten days remain to him in which to restore the stones to the priests in whose keeping they belong. If they are not returned in this time, the holy men will place the eyes of the sahib in the empty sockets of the sacred image of Rajiid, and there they will remain until the lost gems are restored."

Stricken aghast by the awful threat, as well as by my helplessness, I made no attempt to reply. My visitor turned, ascended the stairs, and disappeared from my view; nor have I seen him since that hour.

All that remains of my terrible story may be briefly told.

My flight to Brooklyn had been in vain. Wherever I went I was watched by spies. I notified the police, and, on two occasions, I pointed out men whom I suspected of hounding me. They established their innocence, and I was discredited. The police then began to suspect that I

had attempted to delude them when I reported the loss of the articles from my room.

At length, convinced that the law would vouchsafe me no redress, I turned one day on one of the spies and attacked him so vigorously that I left him insensible on the pavement. I was arrested, subjected to an examination, and pronounced to be a victim of delusions. When the court directed that I be sent to an insane asylum, friends came to my aid and had me placed in a sanitarium.

By this time the ten days allowed to me for the restoration of the gems had expired; but, even though surrounded by madmen, I felt a sense of security in the institution to which I had been committed until, one morning, on looking through a window, I saw two strangers driving along the road. In one of them I recognized one of the spies who had been watching my movements in New York. Accordingly, I obtained an interview with the superintendent and told him my story. He appeared to give little credence to it, but two days later I learned that he had been severely wounded in an encounter with a Hindu whom he had found prowling about the grounds. The next night a mysterious fire consumed the wing of the building in which I had my room.

Once more the superintendent sent for me, and in his presence and that of two strangers I repeated my story. This was many months ago. A week later I was released. Accompanied by the superintendent, I was taken to a house in which I found Mr. Westfall. There I remained carefully guarded and in seclusion, until I was taken to his yacht, which brought me to this barge.

When the Whispering Gentleman finished his narrative, the Nervous Physician pushed back his chair impatiently, and, rising, began to pace to and fro.

"Absurd—utterly absurd!" he exclaimed, disgustedly. "Do you expect me to believe—any sane man to believe—that this blundering friend of yours continued to breathe and speak after the jaboowallah had decapitated him?"

"I have not asked you to believe it," replied the Whispering Gentleman, calmly. "I merely have described to you certain things which I have seen and heard."

The Duckhunter, turning to the Hypochondriacal Painter, who sat beside him, muttered grumpily:

"An insane asylum is the best place for him, after all."

The Hypochondriacal Painter, making no reply, kept his wide, mournful eyes turned to Westfall, who was in the act of taking from Driggs, the servant, a large, covered, silver dish. This dish the host thrust toward the middle of the table, and then removed the cover.

From that moment the voices of all Doubting Thomases were hushed. A long-drawn sigh seemed to issue from the company as each guest gasped for breath. By the removal of the dish's cover, Westfall had revealed a cushion of purple velvet on which gleamed, like the fragments of a scintillating star, two diamonds as large as hen's eggs.

"My friends," said Westfall gravely, "for these gems most women—aye, even those who wear queenly crowns—would sell their very souls. They are the lost eyes of Rajiid's Buddha."

"In Heaven's name—where—how did you come by these?" the Whispering Gentleman asked, tremulously.

Westfall, laughing, shook his head.

"For several weeks both were in your possession, my dear Forsythe," he said.

"In mine?" exclaimed the Whispering Gentleman, who

was now the incarnation of bewilderment. "Did the jaboowallah——"

"No," replied Westfall, interrupting him. "I obtained them from a person who will now occupy the chair that has been reserved for the ninth guest, and from whose lips you will hear the story of the Decapitated Man."

As he spoke, all eyes turned toward the doorway. The curtains were seen to flutter; then the figure of a tall, gaunt man, with pallid cheeks and burning eyes, moved slowly down the steps.

"Ferguson!" hissed the Whispering Gentleman, tottering backward as if he were about to fall.

A moment later the bewildered guests were startled by a low, frightened cry from the farther end of the table, and, turning, they saw the Veiled Aeronaut sink back in her chair.

"Water—water—let's have some water here!" commanded the Duckhunter, as, bending over the inert figure of the young woman, he roughly raised her veil. "Come, be quick—one of you! The lady's fainted!"

The Fugitive Bridegroom, with a water-carafe in his hand, was hurrying toward the end of the table when his gaze fell on the features which the act of the Duckhunter had exposed to view.

Halting suddenly, the Fugitive Bridegroom grew pale as death, and, as the carafe fell from his hand to the floor, an exclamation of amazement escaped his lips.

"Paula—my wife!" he muttered.

The effect produced on the newcomer by the sight of the young woman's face was scarcely less extraordinary than that produced on the Fugitive Bridegroom.

"Pauline!" he gasped. "At last——"

He was starting forward impulsively, when one of Westfall's hands fell on his shoulder.

"Stop!" the millionaire said sharply. "You forget that you promised me that you would not speak to her until I bade you do so."

"True, true," Ferguson replied, sullenly. "But when I promised, I did not believe that you could make good your word. I thank you, sir, and—and, my promise will be kept."

Harvette, the Frenchwoman, was quickly summoned, but by the time she arrived the young woman had recovered and again lowered her veil. Westfall hastened to her side and suggested that she go to her room. The Veiled Aeronaut shook her head, however.

"I will remain," she said, determinedly. "It is better that I should know all now."

Harvette retired, and the guests resumed their places at the table. Then once more Westfall addressed them.

"We will now hear the story of the Decapitated Man," he said.

The ninth guest, resolutely turning his eyes from the Veiled Aeronaut, then began an account of his adventures.

CHAPTER V

THE EYES OF RAJIID

THOUGH, for reasons which you will soon understand, I have been known recently by the name of Alfred Ferguson, I am no other than Cecil, Lord Galonfield, and am the possessor of one of the most venerable titles and one of the most debt-encumbered estates in the United Kingdom.

I am now thirty years of age. Of the incidents of my early life there were few that bore any relation to the adventures which have befallen me in the last two years. I went through Harrow, and from thence to Cambridge, where I took my degree when I was twenty-two. Until this time I believed myself to be heir to a valuable and well-ordered estate. I was soon undeceived, for only a few days after I bade farewell to my student life, I was summoned to the presence of my father, who informed me that, owing to the reckless expenditure made by the last two holders of the title, a period of strict retrenchment was necessary, and that for ten years, at least, it would be necessary to rent our family seat in Yorkshire and our house in London.

My father, who never had made a secret of his desire to have me prepare for a political career, was especially outspoken now on this subject.

"Young as you are, this period of retirement from the fashionable world may be employed to much advantage," he said. "If you will go to Paris or Berlin, where you

are unknown, you will be spared the humiliation of being compelled to expose your poverty. There you can address yourself to the study of political affairs, and thus acquire a fund of knowledge which will be invaluable to you when the time comes for you to enter into your own."

Believing myself to be ill-fitted temperamentally for such a career, I had little liking for the prospect which my father, formerly so indulgent, thus pointed out to me. In his younger days he had served in the army, eventually rising to a colonelcy, and I long had cherished the hope that I might do likewise.

"There is no chance for me in the army, then?" I asked sullenly.

"No," he answered promptly. "Your income, which, for some time, will be limited to three hundred a year, would prove insufficient to support a commission. Besides, as an officer, you might be ordered to India."

There was something in his tone that caused me to look at him with surprise.

"Why should that possibility be regarded as an objection?" I asked, wonderingly.

Removing the eye-glasses he was wearing at the time, he turned to me gravely, and, for several moments, he gazed at me thoughtfully.

"My son," he said, at length, "I was well advanced in the period of middle age when you were born, and, inasmuch as more than fourscore years are behind me, I have not much longer to live. If you go to the Continent, as I have suggested, I may not see you for several months, and in that time much may happen. It is best, therefore, that I should speak with you on a certain serious matter before you go."

As, leaning forward, I watched him earnestly, I saw a strange, far-away expression come into his eyes, and the

hand that was toying with his watch-charm began to tremble. After pausing for several moments, he went on:

"In my breast there is a secret which I had hoped to be able to take with me to the grave. But I shall not succeed in doing this, for during the last ten years I have been aware of the fact that strange influences are at work around me. It is a secret that has to do with India, and which has caused me to view with suspicion every man who has come to me from that awful country."

Pausing again, he looked abstractedly at the wall; then, rousing himself suddenly, he continued:

"Were I to go into all details, the story would be a long one, but I will tell it as briefly as I may.

"As you know, my father had two sons, and of these I was the younger. My brother, Robert—who, by the way, you resemble greatly in more ways than one—entered the army shortly after he obtained his degree. He soon became popular with his brother officers, and, as he displayed considerable military ability, his advancement, due partly to his father's influence, was singularly rapid. At the age of thirty he held a major's commission.

"It was about this time that the Indian Mutiny began, and Robert's regiment was ordered to India, whither I—a twenty-two-year-old lieutenant—already had gone with another regiment. Despite the fact that on several occasions our respective regiments were only a few miles apart, Robert and I did not meet.

"Having received, at the battle of Mungulwar, a wound that incapacitated me for further service, I returned home. Six months later Robert caused to be sent to this country the body of Lieutenant Wortley, who had only a small income, and was almost friendless in England. At Robert's request, my father made arrangements for the unfortunate young man's burial in the parish

church at Hetley, in Northumberland, where his parents and sister were entombed.

"I had been in England only nine months when, upon entering my father's study one morning, I found him stretched lifeless on the floor. He had lived an unbridled sort of life, and for several years he had suffered greatly with the gout. His heart had been weak, and as, spell-bound with horror, I bent over his body, I doubted not that heart disease was responsible for his sudden death.

"Quickly recovering my presence of mind, I summoned the servants and directed one to go for a village doctor. As I became more calm, I picked up from the floor two sheets of paper which appeared to have been dropped by my father as he fell. One of these sheets contained two verses of doggerel, in the handwriting of my brother, Robert. Without reading the verses, I glanced at the second sheet. This I found to be a letter addressed by Robert to our father. It was as follows:

My Dear Father: Within an hour after this is despatched to you, a ball from my own pistol will have ended my life. Two days ago I fell into the hands of a band of native fanatics, who, subjecting me to a series of the most terrible tortures, mutilated me in such a manner that I have resolved never to permit myself to be seen by those who knew me before.

And so, farewell—to you, to my brother, to dear old England and all I have loved. Distant as you are from where I will die to-day, you will be the first to know that your oldest son is dead.

I enclose herewith some verses entitled "Stars of Destiny." As they represent the only literary effort I have ever made, it is my wish that they be pasted on the back of the frame that holds our genealogical chart. It is an absurd request, perhaps, but it is the last that you may have from

Your unfortunate son,
(signed) Robert.

Tears filled my father's eyes as, in a broken voice, he added:

"And thus did I become the twentieth Earl of Galonfield."

"My Uncle Robert's body was never identified?" I asked.

"No," my father said. "His colonel reported him missing. I never heard of him again. The verses were only doggerel, written, I suppose, after the poor fellow's mind had been weakened by the tortures to which he was subjected, but, with reverent hands, I pasted them on the back of the frame, as he requested, and only once since then have I seen them. This was on the day when, imbued with a spirit of heartfelt thankfulness, I took down the chart to inscribe upon it the name of him who was destined to be my only son.

"My father had died in 1859, and having inherited the Galonfield title and estates, I found the latter heavily encumbered by debts contracted by my father and grandfather. Your mother, however, brought me a large fortune, and I was in a fair way to establish my affairs on a financial basis when a series of strange adventures began to befall me. Since then I have lived the life of a haunted man.

"The first of these incidents was my receipt of a letter from the London branch of the Calcutta banking firm of Golphin & Faley. This letter informed me that the firm had been authorized by the Rajah of Nauwar to receive from me two diamonds that had been entrusted to the keeping of my brother Robert during the Indian Mutiny, and which, the bankers said, were then known to be in my possession. Naturally, and truthfully, I asserted that I never had seen or heard of them.

"The bankers were insistent, and, finally, the Rajah brought suit against me for the restitution of the diamonds. He attempted to prove the delivery of the stones

to my brother, but my attorneys soon showed that his witnesses were perjuring themselves. Shortly after this the Rajah died, and for several months I heard no more of the matter.

"At length, however, the affair assumed a far more extraordinary phase, and you may easily imagine my astonishment when I began to receive from India letters written, as were the addresses on the envelopes that enclosed them, in the handwriting of—my brother!

"In each case the fluid used was India ink, and each letter consisted of only a few lines—begging me—commanding me—to deliver the two diamonds to Golphin & Faley without delay.

"In all, I have received no less than thirty of these letters during a period that has extended over thirty years. The last came to my hands three weeks ago.

"As I have said, your mother brought to me a large fortune. When she died, four years after your birth, this was left to me unconditionally, and most of it has been used in attempts to find my brother.

"The letters bearing Robert's signatures were dated in various towns in India—Calcutta, Oodeypoor, Allanhabad, Saugor, and Madras, and the postmarks indicated that they were, in fact, sent from those places. Some of these cities were so distant from one another, however, that the territory which my agents found it necessary to search comprised more than half of the Indian Empire. It is not surprising, therefore, that the search was vain.

"That many persons, other than residents of India, believe that I have these mysterious stones in my possession, is indicated by the fact that, from time to time, dealers in precious stones have visited me and have offered to purchase them at enormous sums. Scarcely a month has gone by that has not found on my desk some letter

threatening me with death or financial ruin if I do not relinquish the gems.

"No house in England has been so frequently entered by burglars as has mine, and I have been obliged to discharge scores of servants whom I have found to be guilty of tampering with my private letter boxes."

"Do you believe my Uncle Robert is still alive?" I asked.

"No," replied my father with decision. "I do not doubt, for a moment, that he died in the course of the few days following the despatch of that last letter to my father. The letters I have been receiving, and which purport to be from him, either are exceedingly clever forgeries, or were written by him, while under duress, after writing to my father."

"Well, it is plain that the Rajah and the others would not have made such determined and costly efforts to get the stones from you had they not an excellent reason for believing that, having come into the possession of my Uncle Robert, they had been forwarded by him to you," I said thoughtfully.

My father nodded.

"That is unquestionably true," he said. "But, despite all the inquiries I have made, I have failed to discover why the stones were given to my brother, or the identity of the person from whose hands he received them. The Rajah asserted that the stones had been stolen from him, and that the thief—a native—entrusted to my brother a commission to take them to England, where they were to be offered for sale. The native is dead, and, while the Rajah pretended to have documentary evidence of the understanding which existed between my brother and the thief, he failed to produce it."

For several minutes we sat in silence; then, rising, my father laid a hand on my shoulder.

"This, my son, is the secret that I have never, until now, asked you to share. I hope and pray that the persecutions to which I have been subjected may not pass to you with the title which you will inherit on my death. If Robert still lives, I hope that he and I may meet again. If he is dead, may his poor spirit rest in Heaven."

The following week I bade farewell to my father, and set off for Paris. I remained in the French capital for four years, and during that time I succeeded in supplementing the three hundred pounds which I had received annually from my father with a couple of hundred pounds for services as Paris correspondent for a London weekly newspaper.

I regret to say, however, that, despite my profound regard for my father, I devoted comparatively little time to the course of study which he had suggested. Living in modest quarters, I found my income sufficient to enable me to mingle with the laughter-loving denizens of the Latin Quarter, and, devoid of all serious ambition, I was well content.

But this irresponsible mode of life was brought to a sudden close when I received from my father the following telegram:

In Heaven's name come to me at once at Wercliffe. My life is no longer my own. Insist on seeing me. Take no refusal.
(signed) GALONFIELD.

An hour later I was on my way to England. Arriving there, I hastened to Wercliffe Hall, our country seat, where I was greeted by strange servants. This fact caused me little surprise, for the Hall had been rented to an

American for a couple of years, and, naturally, our old servants had dispersed.

When, however, a stranger, introducing himself as Dr. Tully, told me that, as my father's physician, he was compelled to ask me to delay my visit to his bedside, my spirit was roused.

"I will go to him at once, even if it is necessary for me to knock down a dozen men who bar my way," I retorted, angrily.

His face grew livid, but whether this was the result of fear or anger I could not tell. He stepped back, however, and, as I passed on, I heard him mutter, sullenly:

"Well, the devil take you, then. I'll not be responsible for the consequences."

Turning quickly, I addressed him again:

"What is the matter with my father?"

"He was stricken with heart trouble, ten days ago," the man replied. "Any excitement, however slight, is likely to prove fatal to him now."

I hesitated, but it was only for a moment. The words of the message flashed into my mind, and I knew that, in the circumstances, it was more probable that my father would be more excited by my tardiness than by my appearance. Accordingly, passing on, with Dr. Tully close at my heels, I came at last to my father's bedchamber.

As I opened the door quietly, I saw my father, wrapped in a dressing-gown, seated in a chair near one of the windows. His face was like a death-mask, and I shrank in horror from the change that had been wrought in his appearance since I had seen him last, six months before.

But for only a moment did my gaze rest on the face and figure of the invalid. Standing beside him, and bending over his chair, was a tall, lanky, clean-shaven man whose features, it seemed to me, I had seen somewhere

before. This man was speaking, in a calm, low voice, but I heard his words distinctly.

"So—so!" he was saying, musingly. "He was preparing to die. And his last request had to do with some verses he had written. You read these verses? Yes—ah, yes—they were sad things—about two stars—two stars of destiny, and you pasted them on the back of a frame that held——"

A low cough behind me caused me to turn sharply. The sound had been made by Dr. Tully.

But the cough had been heard by other ears than mine. The tall man beside my father turned abruptly, and as, with kindling eyes and rising color, he confronted me, I knew him in a moment.

It was Simon Glyncamp, an American, who, two years before, had created a sort of furor in Paris by his mind-reading exhibitions.

"Why are you here?" I demanded—half in anger—half in wonder.

"As an assistant of Dr. Tully's, I might, with more propriety, ask that question of you," he said, and he flashed an ugly look towards the physician.

I was about to speak when a low, shrill cry interrupted me, and, with outstretched arms, my father, trembling violently, rose from his chair.

"Cecil—Cecil, my son!" he cried in accents so pitifully weak that they smote my heart. "Cecil, they are killing me—they have me in their power. I am dying, and this man is robbing me of my soul. Fear him—fear him—Cecil—I——"

He tottered toward me, then, as he fell in my arms, his figure became inert. I bore him to a chair, and, as I laid him down, I looked into his eyes. The lids were raised, but I knew that he never would see me more.

Maddened by rage and horror, I seized Glyncamp by the throat and hurled him toward the door. His head struck the wall and he fell like a bent poker to the floor. I rang for a servant, and when the man appeared, I bade him bring the old village doctor.

An hour later I had driven from the house Glyncamp, Tully, and every servant who had been employed about the place. Among them there was not one who did not know that I had murder in my heart. They went quickly.

The places of the servants were taken temporarily by some of the villagers. That night two strangers, who were found loitering in the park, were stoned from the grounds.

When I became more calm, I secured the services of two detectives, who I directed to obtain evidence showing that Glyncamp and Tully were responsible for my father's death. A few hours later I learned that the villains had crossed the channel.

For the two weeks following the funeral of my father, my attention was absorbed by matters relative to the estate. These I found to be far less serious than I had expected. The frugality of my father and the excellence of his judgment were not without effect. Some debts were still unpaid and there were several mortgages to be lifted, but it was apparent that the financial crisis of the Galonfield affairs had been passed successfully. I did not doubt that two more years would find the estate, not only free from debt, but in such shape as to yield an income of twenty thousand pounds a year. Having reached this gratifying conclusion, I next addressed myself to a solution of the mystery which enveloped the closing days of my poor father.

That a desperate attempt had been made to wring from my father some sort of secret which his tormentors had

believed him to possess was, of course, perfectly apparent. What was it that this American mind-reader had been trying to learn at the moment that my appearance had interrupted his efforts?

I distinctly remembered the words I had heard on that occasion, and I tried to understand their significance. It was plain that the American was leading my father's mind back to the time when he had read the papers that had fallen from my dying grandfather's hand. Why did Glyncamp desire to know what disposition he had made of the verses he found?

Then I suddenly remembered that, despite the fact that my father had told me what he had done with these verses, I had not had sufficient curiosity to look at them. Rising now, I left the study, in which I had been seated, and, entering the library, I took down from the wall the framed genealogical chart of the Galonfield family. Returning with this to the study, I laid it on the desk.

The sheet containing the verses met my glance at once. It was yellow, and covered with dust, but the India ink with which the lines had been written had lost none of its blackness. The paste had dried, however, and, as I touched the paper, it came off the wood to which it was attached. The handwriting was small and almost femininely dainty, and I read:

STARS OF DESTINY.

Rare as two angel-tears congealed
  Are those that flashed their light
Just as great Buddha's gaze revealed
  Its splendors to men's sight.
Immured within a human breast,
  Down Tyneside one shall go.
'Tis only when the truth is guessed
  Shall men behold its glow.

Let him who hath less haste than I,
  Or deems himself less rich,
Seek that from which in fear I fly—
  The treasure in the niche.
Encompassed by the very walls
  Your temple-builders made,
Ere death unto the finder calls,
  Seize fast the long-tongued jade.

I always have been a lover of poetry, but in this I found nothing that appealed to me. The verses left the writer's meaning so obscure that, believing, as my father had done, they amounted to no more than mere doggerel, I dropped them into one of the drawers of my desk. A few moments later my solicitor entered the room to discuss with me some matters that had to do with the settlement of the estate, and the verses ceased to have a place in my thoughts. The chart was returned to its place on the wall without the verses which, in accordance with the writer's wish, had been pasted on the back of the frame before my birth.

Five weeks after my father's death, I received from another American an offer for a lease on Wercliffe Hall, and, having decided to continue, for two or three years at least, my father's policy of retrenchment, I promptly accepted it. A month later I established myself in an apartment in London.

While arranging my papers in the desk in my new quarters, I found that among them were the verses from the chart.

Despite my resolution to curtail my expenses as much as possible, I yielded to the solicitation of an old family friend and joined a couple of clubs which had had the names of Earls of Galonfield on their rolls from the time of their foundation. It was at one of these clubs that I first met Meschid Pasha who, little as I suspected it at

the time, was destined to play an important part in the history of my life.

Meschid Pasha, who had attained considerable prominence as an officer in the Turkish army, was a man about fifty-five years of age, with a pleasing address, thoughtful face and the physique of a man of thirty. I was introduced to him by an old friend of my father's, with whom, however, I had only a slight acquaintance.

The Pasha explained that he had been in London only a few days, and that twenty years had passed since his last visit. Courteously he asked me for certain information concerning the town, and, as I was able to give him this, we soon found ourselves conversing together in terms of easy familiarity. There was something in the man that interested me, and when he invited me to take dinner with him on the following evening, I promised to do so.

He had told me that, designing to spend several months in London, he had rented a furnished house in the West End. Thither I went, at the time appointed, expecting to find a modest town house fitted up in conventional British style. The house itself was modest enough, being in the middle of a dingy brick block, but scarcely had I been admitted to the hall when I became aware of the fact that the fastidious Pasha had established in the heart of London a residence which, by reason of its interior appointments, might have been transported from Constantinople or Damascus.

In the dimly lighted hall I saw a Nubian, clad in Oriental costume, steal like a shadow from a deep niche and noiselessly ascend the stairs. The room to which I was conducted had the aspect of the corner of a Turkish bazaar. The walls were hung with rich Oriental draperies, and were further decorated with shields, simitars, yataghans and spears.

Meschid received me with marked cordiality, and, after a short conversation, led me to an adjoining room where dinner was served. Everything was cooked and served in Oriental fashion.

When dinner was finished we smoked, and, as we smoked, our talk was of the collapse of Russia, the wrangles among Christian sects in Jerusalem, the influence of sea power on history, and Parisian opera. This brought us to a discussion of the relative merits of French, German, Italian, and American singers, and so we talked of women. Then, half-absently, Meschid said:

"My wife was an Englishwoman."

I started, for I knew that among Mohammedans it is regarded as an almost unpardonable breach of etiquette for men to speak of the female members of their families.

"Indeed!" I murmured, faintly.

"My daughter, whose education was entrusted to an English governess, has so long felt a desire to see her mother's native country, that, yielding to her wish, I brought her with me," the Pasha went on gravely. "I regret having done so, however, for her incessant questioning almost drives me mad. I shall try to have her visited each day by some discreet London woman, but your ladies' ideas of a woman's life are so vastly different from ours that I am inclined to fear the result."

"Is your daughter's English governess not with her?" I asked.

"No, my friend, her governess died last year."

"Well, surely, among the wives of your English friends——"

"I have no English friends," he interrupted. "To be perfectly frank with you, I will confess that among my English acquaintances there is none who is so well qualified to win my friendship as is the Earl of Galonfield."

"In view of what you have said concerning your daughter, that is most unfortunate," I said, laughingly. "The Earl of Galonfield has no wife, mother, or sister."

Smiling thoughtfully, Meschid nodded.

"It is most unfortunate," he replied with a sigh. "But what would you advise me to do? Is there any cultured and thoroughly responsible woman you would recommend who——"

He stopped suddenly, and, glancing at me sharply, he slowly twisted one of the ends of his black mustache. For the first time since I had met him I was conscious now of a sense of embarrassment.

"Stop!" he exclaimed, as he saw that I was about to speak. "There is an old adage that directs those who are in Rome to do as the Romans do. We are in England, and, relying on your discretion, I will do as the English do. My daughter shall be present at our council."

He smote his sinewy hands together with a force that startled me, and, responding to this sound, a corpulent negro, wearing a red fez and a long black coat, entered the apartment. To this man Meschid addressed several quickly spoken sentences in a language that I did not understand. The negro bowed profoundly and left the room.

Meschid and I smoked in silence.

Strange as it may seem, I was not agreeably impressed by these manifestations of extraordinary friendliness, and from the moment that my host had first spoken of his daughter, I was conscious of a rapidly increasing feeling of distrust. I was never known as a "woman's man," and all my life I have been peculiarly insensible to flattery. Why had this distinguished foreigner sought my acquaintance? Why was he now manifesting toward me such startling evidence of his confidence?

My discomfiting reflections were dissipated, however, by the parting of the curtains at the door, and the appearance of one of the most remarkable figures on which I ever had gazed.

Clad in a long-sleeved, silken caftan of purple silk, the open folds of which revealed a low, white, gold-embroidered vest, an orange-colored sash and pale-green trousers, it was the figure of a woman. Her head, however, was enveloped in a snowy *yashmak,* and through the slit of this I saw a pair of dark eyes lighted with what appeared to be curiosity and amusement. Her bare feet were thrust into dainty, jeweled slippers of crimson leather, and the light from the diamonds set in her rings and bracelets almost dazzled me.

Utterly bewildered by the suddenness with which I had been confronted with this pearl of an Oriental harem, as well as by my ignorance of the conventionalities which should be observed on such occasions, I started to rise. A moment later, with a fluttering heart and trembling limbs, I sank helplessly back on the ottoman on which I had been seated.

At a word from the Pasha, the young woman had raised her jeweled hands, and, by two or three deft movements, freed her head from the veil.

I was face to face with a beautiful creature that might have been one of those houris who, according to the promise made by Mohammed, await the faithful within the gates of Paradise!

I am not a poet, so I will not attempt to describe the face I saw. It was unnaturally beautiful. Nature had been lavish in her gifts, but these were so supplemented by the work of human hands that the general effect bewildered me. It was plain that nature had not given to this fair woman's lips all their redness, nor had it invested her

lashes and eyebrows with such blackness. Diamonds were shimmering in her hair, many of the stones being so concealed by the dark tresses that I could see only their light.

Without rising, Meschid said quietly:

"This is my daughter, and, with the exception of the members of my family, your lordship is the first man before whom she has unveiled her face."

Rising clumsily, I took in mine the dainty, gem-covered hand the young woman held out to me.

"I am glad that one of my mother's countrymen is the first of your sex that I am permitted to meet," the young woman said, smiling graciously and speaking in faultless English.

She glanced half-timorously toward the Pasha, as if to assure herself that her words had met with his approval.

Meschid smiled grimly, but said nothing.

I stammered a few conventional sentences, then we sat down. As I did so, I observed that a second person had entered the room. This was a tall woman clad in a black gown and a *yashmak* of the same color. She seated herself in one of the corners of the room, and, with her head slightly bowed, remained motionless for the rest of the evening. This, I doubted not, was some withered Turkish duenna to whose care the young woman had been consigned.

In a surprisingly short time I was again at ease. Had it not been for her Oriental costume and cosmetics, this fair stranger easily might have passed for a charming, vivacious young Englishwoman. As it was, there were moments when I felt as if, as a guest at a fancy-dress ball, I was sitting in a corner of an Englishman's home, talking with a couple of English friends.

In the course of the two hours that followed my in-

troduction to this beautiful young woman, we conversed on many subjects, and, incidentally, I learned that her name was Pauline.

"It is not a Turkish name, you know," she explained laughingly. "I was named after a relative of my mother's."

It was ten o'clock when I took leave of my host and his charming daughter. They invited me to visit them again on the second evening following, and at the appointed time I was there.

For more than a month I made a practice of visiting Meschid's house twice each week, and on most of these occasions I was afforded an opportunity to pass an hour in the company of Pauline and the sombre, featureless duenna, who followed her like a shadow, but whose voice I never had heard. And there were times when, as the duenna appeared to be absorbed in memories of distant lands and days, Pauline and I drew so near together on one of the large ottomans that our hands were wont to meet, and I saw in her eyes those wondrous lights that the old Persian poets, looking into others, had seen and sung about.

How much of this the old duenna saw, we never knew.

At length, however, there came a sudden awakening, and I visited Meschid's house no more.

Pauline and I were sitting on the ottoman together, about nine o'clock one night, and talking in whispers that could not have reached the duenna's ears, when I, raising my eyes, saw Meschid, who was scowling darkly, standing in the doorway. Pauline, following the direction of my glance, saw him, too, and, with a little cry, raised her head from my shoulder, on which it had been lying.

For several moments the silence that followed the

discovery of Meschid's presence was unbroken. The Pasha was the first to speak.

"Well, your lordship, you see I trusted you," he said bitterly.

"Nor have I betrayed your confidence," I said calmly, as I rose. "Before introducing me to your daughter, you told me that, being in England, you were prepared to do as the English do. I have taken you at your word, and, having obtained your permission to visit your daughter, I have acted as almost any Englishman who loves a woman would act in similar circumstances. In the English manner I have wooed her, and, as an Englishman who is able to offer her both social position and fortune, I now ask your permission to make her my wife."

Meschid's face was less clouded now. His gaze wandered from me to the duenna at the farther end of the room, and then I saw that the somber figure had risen as if prepared to receive the expected rebuke. This was not forthcoming, however. Walking deliberately toward the center of the room, Meschid addressed his daughter, whose colorless face and frightened eyes were turned toward him.

"Leave us," Meschid said with an imperious wave of the arm.

Pauline, hesitating, turned to me. Taking her hands I pressed them to my lips.

"Whatever happens now, we shall meet again," I murmured. "No earthly power except your own can prevent me from making you my wife."

With a little sigh, she turned to the door. Then, followed closely by the duenna, she left the room.

"Let us smoke," the Pasha said, and, taking a cigar-case from his pocket, he opened it and held it toward me.

I took one of the cigars and we sat down together on one of the ottomans.

"And so you want to marry her," Meschid said, gravely.

"Yes," I answered.

"You are asking me to yield to you the most beautiful woman in the world," he went on, thoughtfully.

"I am well aware of that," I said.

"And you know that every pearl has its price," he added.

A sudden chillness crept over me, and my heart sank. For the first time in my life I knew the sensation of fear. I realized, too, that I was dealing now with a true son of the Orient—a part of the world where women are bought and sold for harems.

"Well, what is the price of this?" I asked him, sullenly.

"The most valuable pair of diamonds known to man," replied the Pasha gravely.

I started, and looked at him sharply..

All was clear to me now. This man had come all the way to London to tempt me. So far as Pauline and I were concerned, he had left nothing to chance. This house, with its Oriental furnishings, had been fitted up for no purpose other than that to which I had seen it applied. It was a trap set for me alone, and baited with —Pauline!

Almost unconscious of the Pasha's presence, I rose and began to pace the floor. In my brain was raging a fire that seemed to be consuming all the respect for man and love for woman that I ever had felt. Was it possible that this splendid woman—the fairest I ever had seen—had been only playing a part? Was she nothing more than a blind, unreasoning puppet that moved in obedience

to this jewel-seeker's will? Or, ignorant of her father's base designs, had she really learned to love me?

While I still was tortured by these conflicting thoughts, it suddenly occurred to me that my position was presenting a second, and no less serious, phase. The shadow of the curse that had blighted my father's life now had fallen upon me! I was in the presence of one of the men who, it was apparent, thoroughly believed that the mysterious diamonds were in the possession of my family. How did he come by this belief?

Glancing toward Meschid, I saw he was watching me stolidly.

"The most valuable pair of diamonds known to man might not be too precious to offer in exchange for such a gift," I said. "But where am I to get them?"

The Pasha shrugged his shoulders.

"Your lordship must find the way," he answered, shortly.

"Do you believe they are already in my possession?" I asked.

"No," Meschid replied. "But I have reason to believe your father knew where they might be found. I doubt not that he communicated the secret to you."

"Have you reason to believe that they are in England?"

"No," said the Pasha, smiling slightly. "If I knew the secret of the hiding place, it is probable that I would not find it necessary to come to you."

"How were you led to suspect that the secret was in the possession of my family?" I asked.

"That is my affair," he retorted.

For several moments both of us were silent. Then, having thought calmly on the matter, I addressed him.

"For many years men have suspected that two valuable diamonds either were in my father's possession or that

he had the secret of their hiding place," I said. "Why they should think this always constituted a mystery that he never was able to fathom. Independent of my interest in your daughter, it is desirable that I find the gems. If they come into my possession I gladly will relinquish them to you in exchange for the gift that it is in your power to bestow on me. I would require as a further condition, however, that publicity be given to the fact that you have become the owner of the stones."

"That responsibility I would assume most cheerfully," Meschid replied with a smile.

"I am perfectly willing," I said, "to undertake the quest, provided it is possible for me to find the clue which, though unknown to me, appears to be identified with the property that I have inherited. If you have any suggestion to offer that is likely to put me on the right track, I beg of you to let me have it."

Meschid shrugged his shoulders.

"I can give you no advice," he said, half contemptuously. "I have told you on what terms I will grant you my consent to marry my daughter. The rest is your affair."

"How much time may I have in which to attain my object?" I asked.

Again the Pasha shrugged his shoulders.

"My daughter is twenty now, and a woman's beauty does not last forever," he answered, sharply. "If, within two years from to-day you deliver these stones to me, Pauline shall be your wife. If you fail to do this within the period I have named—why, then she will become the bride of a more determined suitor."

"What is the history of these stones?" I asked him desperately. "Who was supposed to have had them before they were delivered to my uncle? All large diamonds

have distinctive names. By what names are these known? How am I to learn who had them last, and how they may be identified?"

The Pasha shook his head.

"I have no information concerning these details," he said. "As I have said, it is your affair."

Meschid moved toward the door suggestively as he spoke, but I, standing in the middle of the room, still hesitated.

"Will I not be permitted to see your daughter again before she leaves London?" I asked.

"No," he answered with decision. "I will start for Constantinople to-morrow, and she will go with me."

I bowed and left the room. Meschid, contrary to my expectation, did not accompany me. As I passed through the dimly lighted hall, however, a strange thing happened. A shapeless figure suddenly appeared, then flitted to a doorway. On the wall opposite this doorway was an oval mirror in a massive gold frame, and as I passed it, something in the glass attracted, then riveted, my attention.

It was a human face from which had fallen the folds of the yashmak that had concealed from my view the features of the duenna, and, as I looked, I recognized the long, angular face of Glyncamp, the American mind-reader!

Involuntarily I stopped. For several moments the mirrored eyes gazed steadily into mine, then the face disappeared, and I passed on.

A black-garmented negro, gliding from a niche, met me as, decending the stairs, I made my way to the lower hall. He opened the street door for me, and, stepping out, I found that the city was enveloped in a fog as thick, murky and gloomy as my thoughts.

On the following day I learned that Meschid, Glyncamp, and most of the members of the Pasha's household had left London for Dover. The servants who remained behind were engaged in the task of packing furniture.

The next week I gave much time to the examination of my father's correspondence, hoping to find therein a clue to the identity and whereabouts of some person who might know something more of the mysterious gems than I had been able to learn. My search was vain, however, and, brooding over my failure, late one night, my thoughts were diverted by the entrance of a servant who gave to me the card of a visitor.

As I glanced at the card, an exclamation of pleased surprise came to my lips. I pushed back my chair and hurried to the hall to welcome the one man in all the world for whom, since my father's death, I had entertained feelings of real affection—Frank Blakeslee, an old classmate, who, having obtained a commission in the army, had been serving in India, Africa and Malta, and whom I had not seen for more than four years.

I am not an emotional man, but now my heart seemed to rise to my throat. Since Blakeslee and I had parted last, I had seemed to be living a life of isolation, and during this period there was none I regarded as a confidant. Now, when I saw the smiling bronzed face of my old friend in the hallway, I gave no heed to the hand that he held out to me, but, grasping him by the shoulders, I shook him violently—insanely, like a very fool. My words of welcome fell incoherently from trembling lips, but he read their meaning in my eyes.

Startled by the strangeness of my greeting, my friend looked a little alarmed at first, then, smiling, he said, in his brusque, English way:

"Well, Cecil, how are things with you? I was sorry

to hear of your governor's death. I knew it must have cut you up a bit."

We talked for a while on various subjects of interest to us both. Then, coming back to my affairs, I told him all that had befallen me since my father had revealed to me the strange secret of his life.

Blakeslee watched me intently as I proceeded with my narrative, and, from time to time, the shrewd questions he put to me showed that the last few years had not clouded the keen perceptions that had inspired me with admiration in our college days. I brought the narrative down to the very moment that the servant had placed my friend's card in my hands.

When I finished, Blakeslee slowly settled back in his chair and puffed vigorously at his pipe. I watched him curiously, anxious to learn what effect my recital had upon his mind. At length he spoke.

"How's Cummings?" he asked, absently.

Cummings, an inconsequential fellow, was an old classmate of ours, of whom I had lost sight. His life had never interested me.

"I don't know anything about him," I replied, shortly, and a feeling of resentment sent the blood to my face as I realized that my friend's thoughts already had wandered from the subject I had found so vital.

"A helpless sort of duffer, wasn't he?" said Blakeslee, meditatively. For several moments he smoked silently, then he went on: "But, I say, old man, you haven't showed me that doggerel—those verses, you know—that your uncle wrote."

I hesitated. Blakeslee had disappointed me. As he sat now, thumbing tobacco deeper into the bowl of his pipe, there seemed to be something impertinent in his

complacency. Dominated by a spirit of irritation, I made no reply to his suggestion. He flashed toward me a look of earnest inquiry.

"If you happen to have them anywhere about you, Cecil, I'd sort of like to have a look at them," he persisted.

Half-reluctantly, I opened a drawer of my desk, and, after a little fumbling, found the sheet and handed it to him. He read the verses deliberately.

"Humph—not bad!" he muttered, as he finished reading; then, laying the sheet on one of his crossed knees, he lighted his pipe. "What have you made of them?"

"Nothing," I answered, sullenly.

"But the possibility that they might afford some sort of a clue to the mystery of the diamonds naturally occurred to you," my friend said thoughtfully, as again picking up the sheet he looked at the back of it.

"The idea did occur to me, but there seemed to be nothing in the character of the lines to encourage it. Accordingly, I dismissed it."

"And you didn't look for an acrostic or cryptogram or —or anything of that sort?" he went on musingly, as, with his elbows on his knees, he studied more carefully the lines on the sheet.

"No," I replied.

For nearly five minutes the silence was unbroken. Puffing deliberately at his pipe, Blakeslee kept his gaze on the sheet he was holding before him.

"Well, Cecil, there's something here," he drawled, at last.

I stiffened suddenly. All my resentment left me now.

"Do you know, Cecil, I always had a fancy for this sort of thing," said Blakeslee, with a chuckle. He paused, then added: "He's talking about gems—two of them—that's plain enough."

"He calls them stars—stars of destiny," I protested.

"Figuratively—figuratively, I suppose they are," he said, abstractedly. "But they are gems, for the writer plainly indicates that the objects were capable of being handled—and one does not handle stars, you know. Now, let us see. Listen to this: 'Rare as two angel-tears congealed—' There were two of them, you see. 'Are those that flashed their light—' Diamonds are the only gems that really flash. But now let's see what he means by 'just as great Buddha's gaze revealed—' That 'just' signifies the time the stones were there—that they were—well, some place, I suppose. 'Its splendors to men's sight.' Now it's clear that the 'its' refers to the gaze and not the flashing of the diamonds. In short, then, the diamonds flashed when Buddha gazed."

I rose irritably.

"Oh, that's all nonsense!" I exclaimed. "If you are going to undertake the thing at all, you'd better get on another track."

"Nonsense!" Blakeslee repeated, in an injured tone. "There's nothing nonsensical about it, old top. I've been in India, and I've seen images of Buddha that used to have necklaces of precious stones around their necks. Sometimes the images were veiled. The withdrawal of the veil would reveal the gems and the face of the image at the same time, wouldn't it?"

I went back to my chair. There seemed to be some method in the madness of my friend, after all.

"Well," Blakeslee went on, "let us see how this first verse goes when the lines are taken together.

"'Rare as two angel-tears congealed
Are those that flashed their light
Just as great Buddha's gaze revealed
Its splendors to men's sight.

Immured within a human breast,
Down Tyneside one shall go.
'Tis only when the truth is guessed
Shall men behold its glow.'

That's clear enough, too—in a way."

"Clear enough!" I exclaimed in disgust. "It seems to me that it makes everything more obscure than it was before."

"Not at all," replied Blakeslee, calmly. "It plainly indicates that one of the stones was to be taken from the land of Buddha to England. That's all."

"Come, come, Blakeslee, you are letting your imagination carry you too far from the field," I said. "The last four lines of the stanza, more than all the others, have convinced me that my poor uncle really was in a sentimental mood when he wrote of the 'Stars of Destiny.' They refer to the death of a comrade—Lieutenant Wortley, who, while serving with my uncle in India, was killed in a skirmish with natives. Wortley belonged to a comparatively humble family in Northumberland. The family and its fortune were about extinct at the time of his death. My uncle's affection for the poor devil was so strong, however, that he had the body embalmed and sent to England, paying all the expenses of the funeral himself."

"From what part of Northumberland did Wortley come?" Blakeslee asked sharply.

"From a little village named Hetley," I replied.

"And he was buried at Hetley?"

"Yes—in the family vault in Hetley churchyard. The town is on the river Tyne, and the lines in the 'Stars of Destiny' that read 'Down Tyneside one shall go' doubtless refer to this circumstance."

There was a pause, then Blakeslee said musingly:

"I have heard of men swallowing diamonds in order to hide them—though the act nearly always proved fatal, but stars—never, Cecil—never!"

For several moments I was speechless, and I felt drops of perspiration gathering on my forehead.

"Great Heavens, Blakeslee, you don't think—" I began.

"I'm only guessing, Cecil," he answered gravely. "Listen:

> "'Immured within a human breast,
> Down Tyneside one shall go.
> 'Tis only when the truth is guessed
> Shall men behold its glow.'

I'm only guessing, boy—I'm only guessing."

"But—if these diamonds are all that the Pasha believes them to be, each must be almost as large as the Kohinoor. No man would attempt to swallow such a stone."

"Perhaps he didn't swallow it," said Blakeslee. "It may be that he died before the idea of 'immuring' it occurred to your ingenious uncle."

With an exclamation of horror and impatience I rose.

"The very idea is atrocious!" I said.

"Not at all," Blakeslee protested, complacently. "If men go through life with gold teeth and aluminum jaws in their heads, and silver pipes in their chests, what is there revolting in the idea of a man going to the grave with a diamond in the place formerly occupied by his heart? It was a good thing for the Lieutenant, I should say. Had it not been for that diamond his bones would now be lying in an Indian trench. As it is, he has found burial among his forefathers. There will be no difficulty in getting permission to open the tomb, I suppose."

"No," I murmured. "In view of the fact that mem-

bers of my family had the body brought from India, I dare say the matter readily may be arranged."

Blakeslee nodded.

"Well, there's one of the gems accounted for," he said. "Now let's see to the other one."

He again picked up the sheet containing the verses, and began to study the lines attentively. I gave him little attention. Trembling with excitement, I paced the floor with nervous steps. At length a little chuckle from Blakeslee caused me to halt abruptly.

"As an exponent of practical expression, this old chap was a veritable Wordsworth, Alfred Austin, or Walt Whitman—too simple to become great," he said. "We don't require any of the literary acumen of a woman's Browning club to decipher his meaning. Listen to this:

> "'Let him who hath less haste than I,
> Or deems himself less rich,
> Seek that from which in fear I fly—
> The treasure in the niche.
> Encompassed by the very walls
> Your temple-builders made,
> Ere death unto the finder calls,
> Seize fast the long-tongued jade.'

All that's plain enough, isn't it?"

"Now that the mystery of the first verse has been cleared away, I confess that the lines of the second become more significant," I replied. "The lines, 'The treasure in the niche' have, from the first, encouraged in me the suspicion that the writer might, indeed, be referring to the hiding-place of precious stones. But, while a certain temple undoubtedly is referred to, the lines, 'Your temple-builders made,' and 'Seize fast the long-tongued jade' have baffled me. There is nothing to indicate where the temple may be found, and, as 'jade' undoubtedly signifies

a woman, it is scarcely probable that she has been living all these years. These reflections have led me to believe that the language was only figurative, after all—that 'The treasure in the niche' was Truth, and that the 'long-tongued jade' who must be seized before Death calls to the 'finder,'" was Opportunity."

Throwing back his head, Blakeslee laughed loud and boyishly.

"And so they are—so they are," he said pacifically, as he saw the anger in my eyes. "But let us look at the thing from a distinctively material viewpoint. Briefly, then, the writer tells us that having discovered the hiding-place of the stones, and succeeded in getting away with one, he finds himself compelled to seek safety in flight. Others, less fortunate than he has been, may return for the treasure in the niche, if they will, but, so far as he is concerned, the game isn't worth the candle. Besides telling us that the treasure is in the niche, he also says that the seeker will find it within 'the very walls your temple-builders made.' The 'very' indicates that the walls are the same that had been reared by the builders of the temple in which the stones were at the time of their disappearance, 'your temple-builders' undoubtedly being the builders of the temple in which you are especially interested—in short, the temple originally associated with the gems."

Fairly gasping for breath as the force of this interpretation became impressed upon me, I voiced my last protest.

"But the jade—the jade—" I began.

"That line is at once the most important and intelligible of all," he said. "The word has, of course, several meanings—a tired horse, a woman, and a certain kind of stone that is plentiful enough in India. Many jars, idols, and

other ornaments are made of this stone, and the line in the verse apparently refers to a piece of jade carved in some form that shows a long tongue. In this stone you doubtless will find Diamond Number Two. But the writer warns us that the possession of this is likely to prove fatal to the finder, for he says: 'Ere Death unto the finder calls'!"

"That is all very well," I muttered moodily, "but how are we to know where to look for this temple?"

"My dear fellow, this sagacious, plainly spoken uncle of yours had so little confidence in the perception of his prospective nephew that he left nothing to chance," replied Blakeslee laughingly. "He has told you."

"Told me!" I exclaimed as I took the sheet that Blakeslee held out to me.

"You said, I believe, that you tried to find an acrostic in the lines," Blakeslee went on.

"I tried the first verse only, but I failed. The first letters of the lines are 'R-a-j-i-i-d-t-s'—a combination that is devoid of sense."

"There is no 't,' protested Blakeslee. "The seventh line begins with an apostrophe. The word, therefore, is Rajiid's. In the second verse the acrostic is plain—'Lost eyes.' Thus we have 'Rajiid's Lost Eyes.' Taking these words in conjunction with the idea expressed in the first four lines of the poem—namely, that the diamonds flashed 'just' as Buddha gazed—it is easy to infer that the diamonds served as the eyes themselves. Therefore, the diamonds are the lost eyes. Now, as temples often are designated by the names of the towns in which they stand, it is reasonable to assume that the Rajiid mentioned is the name of the town in which we are to find our temple. Have you an Indian Gazetteer among your books?"

I had one, and quickly placed it in his hands. Blakeslee

turned the pages deliberately. At length he stopped and, taking his pipe from his mouth, read aloud:

"'Rajiid, Nauwar: population, three hundred and twenty-five. Shoorgai, forty miles.'"

As he passed the open book to me, he added:

"Well, there's your temple, laddie. And now give me a place to turn in, won't you? When I got to London it was too late for me to get a train out to the mater's place, so I thought I would come up and smoke a pipe with you. I won't be up to town again for a week or so—unless—well, I'll see that thing through with you at Hetley, if you like."

That night Blakeslee shared my bed with me. He was soon asleep, and it was not long before he had the bed to himself; for, after tossing restlessly for a couple of hours, I rose and, donning my bathrobe, paced the floor of the library until after daybreak. At breakfast it was arranged that I should communicate with the rector of Hetley Church, and that, as soon thereafter as might be practicable, Blakesle should go with me to the vault where our gruesome task was to be performed.

When Blakeslee left me, I at once proceeded to formulate a general plan for the intended undertaking.

All his life my father had been watched by spies. In Glyncamp, who had so nearly succeeded in obtaining from him the secret of the mysterious verses, I recognized a powerful enemy. Was he working in the interest of Meschid or in his own? Were his interests or those of Meschid allied with interests of the native Indians who had attempted to get the stones from my father? If not, how many independent jewel-seekers were to be numbered among my persecutors?

I saw at once that it was all-important that I should move with secrecy. Glyncamp was the man I most

dreaded, and I shuddered when I reflected what might happen to me, now that the mystery lay open in my mind, if Glyncamp should succeed in getting me in his power. How easily this might be effected was shown by my experience in that dimly lighted house of the Pasha's, when, in the guise of a veiled Turkish woman, he had sat, unrecognized, in the room with me for hours.

In less than an hour I had decided to abandon the policy of retrenchment that had been inaugurated by my father. All my energies, financial and otherwise, now would be directed to the task of obtaining these diamonds. I would win Pauline, and, by publicly transferring the gems to other ownership, I would remove the curse that had pursued my father to his grave and now was casting its shadow over me.

Sending for the head of one of the most prominent private detective agencies in London, I directed him to secure all possible information relative to Glyncamp's past life, and to locate him and keep him under surveillance. Some of this information reached me quickly.

I learned that the man was a native of Ohio, and that, having won considerable celebrity as a mind-reader in the United States, he had gone to Paris, where his performances had excited extraordinary interest. Impressed by his singular ability, the Russian government had offered him a large sum to go to that country and give his services to the secret police. He had about decided to accept this offer when a proposition coming to him from Turkey caused him to change his plans. He went to Constantinople, and his arrival in the Turkish capital was followed quickly by the discovery of the secret plans of a revolutionary society. This resulted in more than a score of executions. Then Glyncamp's trail was lost, only to be found again when he appeared in England with

Meschid Pasha. Upon leaving London with the Pasha, the mind-reader again had disappeared.

Convinced of the correctness of Blakeslee's interpretation of the mysterious verses, I decided that the sooner the tomb in Hetley churchyard was opened the better would be my chance of keeping the proceeding secret. I saw that I must do one of two things. Either I would have to write to the rector, or I would have to see him personally. I realized that writing on such a subject would be unwise in the circumstances, but I reflected that, if I made two visits to Hetley, I would take a double chance of exciting the suspicion of spies.

In the end, I came to the conclusion that the better plan would be to summon Blakeslee, and, accompanied by him, get to Hetley about the middle of some afternoon, and, after obtaining the rector's consent to the proceeding, go to the churchyard at night and perform the necessary task.

I selected as the date of our visit to Hetley the second day of the new moon, hoping that in the darkness our visit to the churchyard would be unobserved by villagers.

Fortunately, all weather conditions were in our favor. Blakeslee and I arrived at Hetley in a driving rain. We found our way to the rectory without trouble, and were there greeted by the Rev. John Wivering, the rector. To him I explained who I was, and I told him that the purpose of my visit was to obtain from the inside lining of Lieutenant Wortley's coat a paper of the greatest importance which had been placed there by my uncle. The fact that this was there, I said, had been revealed by a document which I found among the papers of my father.

Though a little startled at first by the nature of my purpose, the rector assented readily enough to my request. The key to the vault was in the sexton's room in the

church, but the sexton himself was confined to his bed by an attack of quinsy. The rector offered to summon a couple of villagers to give us any assistance that we might require, but we assured him that the task was so comparatively simple we needed no aid.

Convinced that I was the person I represented myself to be, and that my purpose was perfectly legitimate, the rector readily promised to maintain the strictest secrecy concerning the proceeding. We had tea with the good man and his wife; and, soon after darkness fell, Blakeslee and I, carrying a satchel that we had brought with us, repaired to the churchyard.

The task of conquering the rusty lock occupied more than ten minutes, but it yielded at last. The rust-encrusted iron door moved inward, and a rush of damp air passed our faces.

Stepping quickly inside the vault, I drew a dark lantern from the satchel and bade Blakeslee close the door. A few moments later the lantern's fan-like ray was sweeping the floor, roof, and walls.

In the general aspect of the vault there was nothing to inspire an average man with a sense of morbidness. The open space was about ten feet square. The walls were of sandstone, and in these were set slabs of yellowish marble on which were inscribed in black letters the epitaphs of the persons entombed behind them. The slab bearing the name of Lieutenant Wortley was almost level with the floor.

From the satchel we took chisels and mallets. The plaster surrounding the slab was easily crumbled, and, working quietly and quickly, we succeeded in releasing the slab in about twenty minutes. Behind this we encountered a row of bricks. These were soon removed, and, at last, we beheld the side of the box we sought.

Without pausing, we addressed ourselves to the most formidable part of our task—that of withdrawing the box from the niche into which it had been thrust. But the efforts of our perspiring, muscle-strained bodies told at last. Then, with fingers quivering as a result of the violence of our efforts, we produced a couple of screw-drivers and began to remove the screws from the cover of the box. The raising of this disclosed the top of a casket covered with black cloth.

Once more we returned to work with our screw-drivers, and the second lid soon was lifted. Beneath this was a coffin, crudely fashioned of lead. Fearing that this was sealed with metal, we examined it carefully, and were relieved to find that, like the others, the cover was only screwed down.

At length, Blakeslee and I, having worked our way around the gruesome box, came together. My companion was withdrawing the last screw. In a few moments the result of our quest would be known to us.

"Well, Cecil, let's have it off," said Blakeslee after a brief period of hesitation, during which each of us looked at the pale face and questioning eyes of the other.

Bending, Blakeslee grasped one end of the lid and I took the other. As we lifted this, I kept my gaze on the metal cover until we laid it on the floor. Then, for the first time, I turned my eyes to that which its removal revealed.

"By Jove!" Blakeslee gasped, and stopped.

Well might we have been astonished at the object that now presented itself to our view—the body of a soldier, clad in a scarlet jacket and blue trousers. The head was large, and on the young, handsome features there was an expression of dignified serenity that one might have expected to find on the face of a sleeping Charlemagne.

"Why, the man looks as if he might have been alive this morning!" I gasped.

Kneeling beside the still figure, Blakeslee began to unbutton the jacket with such gentleness that one would have thought he was afraid of waking the sleeper.

"They cut his head a bit," mused Blakeslee, as he glanced at the dark hair critically.

He had scarcely spoken, when, throwing back the folds of the jacket, he exposed the bare torso of the still figure.

"That's what did it, though," whispered my soldier friend, pointing to a round, bluish hole in the middle of the chest. "He was facing the brown devils when he fell—one of the Queen's own lads was this one, Cecil."

But my gaze had wandered lower. There I saw two lines—one perpendicular, the other horizontal—that formed a cross, made, as I knew by the embalmers. These lines had been roughly stitched, but some of the catgut threads had been torn away.

Blakeslee gave utterance to a little exclamation of dismay.

"Some one has been here before us," I muttered between chattering teeth.

"Give me the scissors," directed Blakeslee grimly.

I passed them to him, then, with trembling limbs, I, too, knelt beside the box.

A few moments later, when my friend again closed the scarlet jacket over the cold breast, I, sitting limply on the floor, thrust into the inner pocket of my coat a hard, oblong object that was sewed in a little bag of oiled silk which exhaled the odor of fragrant spices—a bag that I did not attempt to open then.

I tottered to my feet, and, as Blakeslee took one of the dead man's hands, I grasped the other.

"Good night, old chap," Blakeslee murmured, address-

ing the dead soldier. "Perhaps, some morning, the same bugle music will wake us both."

As carefully as we had opened the three boxes, we closed them again. We made no undue haste to leave the place. To the dead we gave all that was its due. Every screw that we returned to its place was well driven, and when the big box had been thrust back into the niche, we replaced the stones as well as we were able. I resolved, however, that more expert hands than ours soon should be entrusted with this task.

It was after nine o'clock when, after thanking the rector, we returned to the railway station, just in time to catch a train for London. It was six in the morning when, sitting at my desk, with Blakeslee at my side, I severed the threads that had closed the little silken bag.

Within the bag I found a roll of chamois-skin, and in this a roll—a diamond.

Not until I shall lie in that deep sleep that sealed the eyes of the red-jacketed hero I saw at Hetley shall I cease to feel a thrill of fear and wonder as I recall the effect produced by the object that the unfolding chamois-skin disclosed to my view.

Catching, holding and multiplying the rays of the lamp-light that fell upon it, the marvelous gem suddenly seemed to become the focal point of ten thousand dazzling beams —a whiteheated thing that was being slowly consumed in its own blaze of glory—a self-damned soul on which Heaven and hell had heaped their fires.

As I tottered backward, Blakeslee grasped my arm. Looking at him then, I knew that his long face mirrored the lividness and horror of my own.

"Cecil, we must stop it!" he gasped, faintly. "If it is seen——! Come, come, man—we must put it out!"

We glanced around us with apprehensive, searching

eyes. The shades were lowered and the doors were closed, but we asked ourselves whether it was possible that no eyes other than our own should have seen this outburst of supernatural radiance.

For several moments my courage seemed to fail, and I could not bring myself to the point of touching the dazzling stone. At length, however, I reached for the chamois-skin, and, after dropping this over the gem, I placed the diamond in a drawer of my desk.

"You can't keep it there," said Blakeslee in a hoarse whisper.

"No," I said. "To-morrow—to-day——"

"If spies are hovering around you the way they hovered around your father, England is too small a place for that. You must get it somewhere——"

"I've thought all that out, old man," I answered, firmly.

"What are you going to do with it?" my friend demanded, curiously.

"I won't tell you that," I replied.

An expression of wonder leaped into Blakeslee's eyes.

"You—you mean you dare not trust me!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," I answered, promptly. "I do not trust myself. If it is known that you and I possess this secret, there is one who may have it in his power to get it from us. When we find the other stone we will see them together. Meantime, both you and I must be ignorant of the hiding-place of these."

Blakeslee nodded.

"You're afraid of Glyncamp, then," he said, meditatively. "Well, you are right. It is best that neither of us should know. But how are you going to manage it?"

"I'll be out of England within the next twenty hours."

Blakeslee frowned.

"You are going to the Continent?" he asked.

"No," I answered, shortly. "But if you are willing to join me in my search for the other stone, we will set out five months from to-day. Until that day we must not meet."

"How long will we be gone?" Blakeslee asked.

"Three months."

"I can get a furlough for that period, I suppose," he murmured, musingly. He paused; then, with a little shrug of the shoulders, he held out both hands to me, as he added: "All right, then, Cecil—furlough or no furlough, you can count on me."

I grasped his hands.

"And you are going to give the gems to the Pasha for the girl?" he murmured, dubiously.

I nodded.

"Well, Cecil, either the girl is indeed an houri, or you're a fool," Blakeslee muttered as he turned away.

Ten hours later I boarded a west-bound Cunarder at Queenstown. In a belt I carried one of the lost eyes of the Rajiid Buddha.

During the six days occupied by the voyage, I formulated my plans for the quest of the second diamond and the protection of the first.

Several days before Blakeslee and I had gone to Hetley, I had seen in an English newspaper an account of some of the adventures of an American traveler named Forsythe. This man had made travel a vocation, and, in the employ of scientists and institutions of learning, he had brought from various parts of the world objects of interest that now formed parts of famous collections. He was described as a man of fertile resource and unimpeach-

able integrity. I had heard of him before, and there was something in his personal characteristics and mode of life that had appealed to my imagination, and sometimes I had even gone so far as to envy him his experiences.

I now reasoned that, taking advantage of this man's resourcefulness and reputation, I might cause the diamond to be removed from India in a manner that would prevent anyone from suspecting the real purpose of a visit to Rajiid. More than this, I also conceived the idea, not only of keeping Forsythe in ignorance of the fact that he was to have the second diamond in his possession, but compelling him to be the temporary, and unsuspecting, custodian of the stone I had found at Hetley. After having Forsythe conceal the Hetley stone, I would arrange with Dulmer, my solicitor, to have an agent remove the sealed package containing it from the place in which it might be kept by the absent Forsythe. Not even should Dulmer know the nature of the packet's contents.

My instructions to Dulmer also bade him be prepared to have in the United States a man who, as soon as he should receive the word to do so, might take forcible possession of all objects that I might cause Forsythe to take to that country. The signal for these double thefts of my own property would be a report of my death to Dulmer. Each detail of the plan was thought out carefully.

To most persons this plan, with all its elaboration of details, might have appeared not only unnecessary, but altogether absurd. But the strange power of Glyncamp had impressed me with so much respect and alarm that, with so much at stake, I resolved to leave nothing to chance. I was resolved that no man in the world should fall into Glyncamp's power, who in sickness or in health, would be able to form a mental picture of the true cus-

todian of the Hetley stone or the place in which it might be concealed.

Upon arriving in New York, I engaged a room in a house occupied by a family that was in reduced circumstances. Assuming the name of Alfred Ferguson, I allowed my beard to grow, and, dressing only in cheap garments, I kept out of the streets as much as possible. Inquiries which I made concerning Forsythe revealed that he still was in South America, and probably would not return to the United States for two months.

I next proceeded to address myself to a task which I had set for myself while I still was on the steamer. Obtaining some plaster of paris I made a cast of the Hetley diamond. Then, taking this cast to a Maiden Lane lapidary, I directed him to supply me with two paste counterfeits. I had thought that this was a comparatively simple undertaking, but I was soon undeceived. The lapidary told me that the work would have to be done in Switzerland, and that it would be impossible for me to have the imitation stones in less than two months. I gave the order, left a deposit on it, and went out of the shop.

I had been in New York only ten days when I received from Blakeslee, the only man who knew my address, a cipher despatch that read as follows:

> Parson says Glyn knows Hetley affair. Burglars have ransacked your London apartments and spies are watching the house. Keep close where you are, and look sharp. I am not suspected.
>
> (Signed) B

The three weeks that followed were uneventful, and I spent most of my time in my room. I heard that Forsythe was on his way to New York, and I wrote to my solicitors to arrange to have fifty thousand dollars placed

to my credit in a Philadelphia bank. Two weeks later this sum was at my disposal.

At last my patience was rewarded. The daily newspapers reported Forsythe's arrival, and from the Maiden Lane lapidary I received the two paste stones that had been cut for me in Switzerland.

The lapidary appeared to be enthusiastic over the merits of the imitations when he greeted me.

"Were there two such real diamonds in existence, they would be worth millions, sir," he said.

To give the lapidary his due, I must confess that the paste gems were so excellently wrought that they filled me with astonishment, for I never had suspected that the art of counterfeiting precious stones could attain such wonderful results. A man would, of course, have been little better than a fool to have been deceived by these paste baubles, but I scarcely had expected to see any brilliancy at all. The forms of the stones and a superior quality of material were sufficient to meet all my requirements.

I expressed thorough satisfaction with the manner in which the work had been done, and willingly paid the price that had been agreed upon.

I next had a tinsmith make for me a cylinder six inches long and three inches in diameter. In this I placed the Hetley diamond, carefully packed; then, in accordance with my instructions, the tinsmith sealed both ends. This done, I shaved off the beard I had been wearing, provided myself with twenty-five thousand dollars, and called upon Forsythe.

The incidents connected with that interview, as well as those that had to do with Forsythe's journey to and from Rajiid, have been related by that gentleman himself. I,

therefore, will restrict myself to a relation of my own experiences subsequent to that interview.

Upon receiving from Forsythe's messenger the key to the unknown safe-deposit box, I delivered it to a New York lawyer who had been named by Dulmer as his representative. Meantime, however, a detective, who was unknown to this lawyer, in accordance with my London solicitor's directions, had kept a careful watch on Forsythe and had followed him to the office of the safe-deposit company. This detective then sent the name and address of the company to Dulmer, who, it will be remembered, knew nothing whatever of any diamond in which either my father or I had been interested.

Embarking on the same vessel that took Forsythe to Europe, I spent nearly all my days and nights in my stateroom in the second cabin. I was in my stateroom on the *Arran* when Forsythe boarded that steamer.

Blakeslee, having obtained his furlough, secured a stateroom near the second cabin quarters on the *Arran*. For weeks he had been indefatigably working in my interests, without causing any of the spies who were following me to suspect that he was in any way interested in my movements. To him three detectives, in his employ, had described the appearance of several of the spies who had been seen lurking around my former haunts.

On the *Arran* were several Hindus. One of these conformed with the description of a Hindu to whom certain spies had reported. Apparently this man, having failed in his mission to London, was returning to India without the knowledge of the fact that I was on the same vessel. Chance, however, led me in his way one night when I had determined to have a few words with Blakeslee.

My friend saw that I was recognized, and in obedience to a warning signal from him, I retreated. That night

the Hindu died under mysterious circumstances. He was only an unknown Hindu, so the officers of the *Arran* made no investigation. All happened very conveniently.

The discovery of this spy caused me to change my plans. Despite what I had told Forsythe—and I must confess that my representations to that gentleman were sometimes rather far from the truth—I had intended to let him go to Rajiid alone, while Blakeslee and I took another route. I now decided, however, to have Blakeslee and Forsythe follow me.

At Arungabad I found two brothers—Parsees—who, like other members of their sect, had little respect for Buddhism or its disciples. The elder of these brothers was named Ahmed-Kal. The younger was Bunda. I had six servants, but of these the two Parsees were the only ones whom I felt I could trust.

I felt reasonably certain, until I drew near Rajiid, that I was successful in keeping clear of spies. Upon my arrival at Rajiid, I visited the holy well and its temple, as any other traveler might have done. I watched a jaboowallah perform his tricks, and then passed on my way. While in the temple I was careful not to display any undue interest, but I had little difficulty in marking the jade idol in a niche near the ceiling.

After leaving Rajiid, I proceeded to a village about ten or twelve miles beyond. Here, pretending to be ill, I halted to await the arrival of Forsythe and Blakeslee at Rajiid. In due time this was reported to me.

Thus far I had believed myself to be free from suspicion, and already I had begun to laugh at the fears which had caused me to make such elaborate preparations for my quest for the hidden gem. I had little difficulty in convincing myself that, without Forsythe and Blakeslee,

I might have purchased the jade idol and made my way out of India.

Satisfied, then, that my purpose was not suspected, I despatched Ahmed-Kal to Forsythe with a note directing him to purchase certain articles and return home by way of Calcutta. By the time Ahmed-Kal returned, however, I was undeceived. Scores of native, cat-like eyes had been watching me for hours.

It was Bunda who first told me this—Bunda, the brother of Ahmed-Kal. From one of my alarmed native attendants he had learned that I had come to Rajiid to take from their place of concealment the lost eyes of the bronze Buddha.

When Bunda told me this, I laughed at his fears, but I put in his hands a little parcel wrapped in khaki-cloth, and bade him take my horse and set out for Bombay. I told him that fortune awaited him there if he delivered to a certain man, whose name I gave, the parcel that I entrusted to his keeping. I explained also that if he betrayed his trust the soldiers of the White King would flay him, for that which I had given to him was the White King's own. The parcel contained the imitation gems.

When I saw that the man believed me, I provided him with funds for his long journey, for as fast as one horse succumbed to speed he was to purchase another—the fleetest he could obtain. When Bunda left me I awaited, with all the calmness I could command, the hour that would bring to me the report of Forsythe's departure from Rajiid.

But, before that hour came, the blow which I dreaded had fallen, and it had come from an unexpected source. Bunda was scarcely more than a dozen miles from Rajiid when I was suddenly set upon, beaten insensible, and

bound by my own attendants. It was in vain that Ahmed-Kal tried to defend me, and even he suspected for a time that his brother, knowing of the danger, had sought safety in flight.

When I recovered consciousness I was bruised and bleeding, and was in the temple grounds where Forsythe found me. Before me stood the jaboowallah who had exhibited his skill as a wonder-worker when I was leaving the Rajiid temple. Addressing me in excellent English, he questioned me shrewdly concerning the object of my journey to India, and my reasons for visiting Rajiid. I told him I was a traveler, bound for the military station at Shoorgai. His eyes flashed ominously while I was speaking. When I finished he said:

"The sahib lies. He is Lord Galonfield, and he has come to us to profane and rob our shrines. Unless he tells us where we may find the sacred gems that were once the eyes in Buddha's image, he will speak no more."

I shrugged my shoulders as I answered:

"I have told you that my name is Ferguson. The hiding-place of the lost eyes is unknown to me. But if, doubting what I say to you, you find courage to shed my blood, there will come to Rajiid men with coats as red as the blood you now design to spill."

"The White King's soldiers will come in vain," the jaboowallah answered, calmly. "Though I shall cleave the sahib's head from his shoulders, yet shall he not die except by his own act, nor shall the soldiers find him. Has the sahib any wish to express before he dies?"

I hesitated.

"Yes," I said. "I am informed that, since I left your temple, another traveler has come to Rajiid—Forsythe Sahib. Let him see my body, that he may report my death to my friends in England. It is better that they

should know that I am dead than that they should spend their fortunes seeking me."

I saw the light of craftiness playing in the jaboowallah's eyes. I knew his thought, and that Forsythe would be brought to me before I died. I knew, too, that I would not be allowed to die till they had the secret from me.

"It shall be as the sahib has said," the jaboowallah replied, but, as he spoke, my heart grew still, for he unsheathed a sword.

At the feet of the jaboowallah several natives now spread a square piece of white cloth, and eight or ten brown, sinewy hands forced me to sit on it in a cross-legged position. This done, the natives, retreating, left me sitting alone, at the jaboowallah's feet.

"If the sahib wants to count the minutes and hours that precede the coming of his friends let him sit still as the great Buddha on his throne," the jaboowallah said.

His eyes now gleamed like fiery coals, and, as they bent their gaze upon me, I felt my will go out. The jaboowallah raised his arm, and thrice in the moonlight I saw the flashing of his swift-circling blade. A keen pain quivered in my neck and set every nerve in my body tingling.

"And so shall the sahib await the coming of his friends," said the jaboowallah as, sheathing his sword, he turned from me.

A few minutes later the sound of retreating feet died away. I was alone.

I was not deceived. The wound I had received was nothing more than a mere scratch, however, which this strange man's art had caused to completely encircle my neck. It marked the beginning of the series of tortures to which I was to be subjected in the course of an attempt to wring my secret from me.

I saw Ahmed-Kal, trembling with fright, mount and ride away in the direction of Rajiid. For more than an hour, conscious of the fact that I was watched by scores of unseen eyes, I sat there, never stirring.

At length, from over a rise in the road, there came to my expectant ears the welcome sounds of approaching hoofbeats. Then a little cavalcade came into view. At its head rode Forsythe, Blakeslee, and Ahmed-Kal.

I heard the horses stop in the road, and a few minutes later I saw my friends approaching me.

I knew no word that might pass between us would escape the ears of spies who were concealed in the foliage around me, but I was resolved that Forsythe and Blakeslee should not be suspected of being the real custodians of the precious gem that was concealed in the jade image.

But, shrewd as my friends usually were, this mysterious situation now disconcerted them. They thought that I, believing myself to be decapitated, had lost my reason. Despite my protests, Forsythe called to his attendants, and Blakeslee drew his revolver. A score of armed natives leaped upon them. Forsythe went down, but Blakeslee, fighting like a very demon, shot four men and broke away. He got to where the horses had been left, and, mounting his own—an animal that had been carefully chosen—he made off in the direction of Shoorgai.

Ahmed-Kal, who had attempted to defend himself, was beheaded. Forsythe was borne away insensible.

An hour later, while strung up to a beam by my hands, and with heavy stones bound to my feet, I confessed—confessed that I had found the lost diamonds under the coping of a well near which I had encamped, and that Bunda, the Parsee, was bearing them to Bombay.

Further tortures were now suspended, and I was im-

prisoned in a dingy cave, scooped in the side of a hill. From one of my guards I learned that Forsythe had been released, and had left Rajiid. Why the jaboowallah caused his vocal cords to be cut I cannot tell. I suppose, however, it was the brown devil's method of punishing him for calling to his attendants while he was in the sacred precincts of the temple.

I knew that, as a result of my pretended confession, riders and telegrams were being despatched to many villages in an attempt to head off the fleeing Bunda. A week passed, however, before I was summoned to the presence of the jaboowallah and there confronted with the paste stones I had obtained from Switzerland.

I was asked whether or not these were the stones I had found in the wall. I replied that they were.

Never have I beheld such a picture of chagrin as was presented by the jaboowallah at that moment. He believed that the famed eyes of the Rajiid Buddha had been nothing more than the imitation stones that now lay before him.

I was told that I was free. Two hours later I was in the act of mounting the horse which was to bear me away from Rajiid when I was again assaulted. Once more I was thrust into the foul cave, and there, deprived of food and water, my sufferings soon became almost unendurable. In a week I felt that I was on the verge of becoming a raving maniac, then they gave me water and I was led out into the light. Something—whether it was the sun or a flash of burnished copper—suddenly dazzled me, and I fell.

When I recovered consciousness, I found myself sitting on the floor of a squalid room, and muttering incoherently.

"Give the sahib food," a voice was saying.

The speaker was the jaboowallah, and, as he passed out of the door in which he had been standing, I saw a European approach him. A moment later the stranger disappeared, but my single glance was enough.

The stranger was Glyncamp!

Had I betrayed my secret? Whimpering and laughing like a foolish child, I cried for food.

It mattered not how much the American mind-reader had learned from me, the knowledge came to him too late.

A week later, shattered in health and mind, I crawled out of the dark cave in which I had been confined. Where were my gaurds, and why had no one brought me food? As I stood, blinking the warm sunlight, I saw a man in khaki. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. The man was still before me, sitting on a stone, with a rifle across his knees. I called to him, and he turned. He shouted and discharged his gun in the air, and then ran toward me. It was a British soldier whom I never had seen before.

"Are you Galonfield?" he asked.

"Yes—yes—I'm—" I began falteringly.

The man, bringing his heels together, saluted me as if I had been an officer.

"Your friend, Lieutenant Blakeslee, is here, sir," he said.

Sky, trees, and distant native huts seemed to be flung together in a mighty mass, and I was dazzled by the whirling colors. I tottered forward, and, as I fell, the soldier caught me in his arms. When I came to my senses, I was lying on a camp cot, and Blakeslee was bending over me.

"What has happened?" I managed to gasp.

"I got to Shoorgai, and brought down the boys," he said. "For two weeks we've combed the district in our

search for you. You are twenty miles from where I saw you last. The jaboowallah fled—saw the game was up, I suppose."

"And Glyncamp?" I asked anxiously.

"Oh, Glyncamp hasn't been here, old man."

"Yes," I muttered, weakly. "Glyncamp has been here and has learned all I knew."

As soon as I was able to make the journey, Blakeslee and I returned to England. There I learned that my plans had not miscarried. The jade image and the cylinder were safe in New York.

Meantime, Forsythe had been incarcerated in an American insane asylum. Not knowing anything of the manner in which he had been persecuted, I did not suspect that he was at that moment perfectly sane and the victim of the jaboowallah's spies.

The very thought of the gems themselves was hateful to me, and I resolved to get rid of them at the earliest possible opportunity. To this end I sent to Meschid a letter that read as follows:

YOUR EXCELLENCY: Having succeeded in performing the task which you set for me when we last met in London, I am now prepared to deliver to you the articles which you demanded in exchange for the honor I then sought at your hands. If, therefore, you will meet me in London or Paris with the person who constitutes the third party to our understanding, all the conditions of our compact will be promptly executed.

Three weeks passed before I received a reply. The Pasha said that, in order to fulfil the conditions we had agreed upon, it would be necessary for me to present myself at his residence in Constantinople and there deliver to him the articles which, as had been stipulated, he should receive.

But I was still a marked man, and there were strong

reasons for my hesitation to go beyond the pale of English law and the protection which it affords even to the humblest of England's sons and daughters.

I now sent to an attaché of the British embassy at Constantinople a letter in which I explained that I was bethrothed to Meschid's daughter, Pauline. I also said that, owing to my failure to get in communication with her, I desired to have agents employed to discover her present whereabouts. The answer I received to this was a telegram that read:

Pauline is Meschid's stepdaughter. He married her mother, the widow of the late Prince Maranotti, of Basselanto, Italy. The mother died two years ago. Pauline fled to her stepbrother, the present Prince Maranotti. Her whereabouts are unknown to us.

At the end of a fortnight I was in Italy. Leaving Naples, I started for Basselanto. I had covered only a portion of the journey, however, when, in a newspaper that came to my hands, I saw a startling piece of intelligence.

Prince Maranotti had been murdered at Basselanto only a few hours before!

The dead man's body, bruised and scratched, apparently by human hands, had been found at the foot of a cliff over which, it was thought, it had been hurled by the murderer.

Two men were suspected of having committed the crime. Of these one was a man with a singularly grotesque face, whom no one in the vicinity of Basselanto remembered having seen before the day on which the Prince had met his death. A few hours before the body was found, however, he had been seen hurrying to the station, apparently in a great state of agitation.

The second person under suspicion was an American

college professor—Pietro Maranotti—a cousin to the man who had been slain.

Arriving at Basselanto, I made inquiries concerning Pauline. From servants I learned that she had not been seen at Basselanto since, as an infant, she had been taken away by her mother, an Englishwoman, who, having been married to the former Prince, had fled from his cruelty.

Despite all the privations to which I had been subjected since I had undertaken the quest of the Rajiid diamonds, my love for the beautiful young woman to whom Meschid had introduced me, had been strengthened rather than diminished. I asked myself why, if she was in trouble, she had made no attempt to communicate with me. I resolved that to the solution of this mystery I would address myself with even more energy than I had displayed in my search for the gems which, as it had been arranged, were to constitute the price of Meschid Pasha's consent to our marriage. I was determined to employ all my time and whatever fortune I could command in finding the woman I loved.

Once more I had recourse to detectives. These I directed to trace the movements of Pauline from the time she escaped from Meschid's harem. It was not long before these men reported that they were crossing the trails of other detectives who were engaged in a similar search. Then I learned that the employer of these was no other than the mysterious Glyncamp, of whom I had seen or heard nothing since I saw him in India.

My available funds were growing low, and I decided to sell the diamonds for which I had risked so much and for which Meschid Pasha had nothing to offer now. By doing this I would attain two objects. First, they would yield to me a sum sufficient to enable me to liquidate all the debts

I had contracted, and, secondly, I would cease to be an object of the persecution of the unseen enemies who still threatened me. Having arrived at this determination, I sailed for the United States.

Upon my arrival in New York I went to the best-known jeweler in that city. To this man I told the history of the Rajiid stones, and offered them for sale. He replied that he was unwilling to buy such costly gems as a matter of speculation, but that he would try to find a purchaser. A few days later he wrote to me, requesting me to call on Hewitt Westfall.

It was with Mr. Westfall that I went to the vault in which the cylinder and the jade image were deposited, and it was in his study that the cylinder was opened and the jade image broken. There, for the first time since the Indian Mutiny, the wonderful gems flashed together, and it is to Mr. Westfall that they now belong.

To the purchaser of the lost eyes of Rajiid's Buddha I told the story of my quest for them. Strangely enough, he appeared to have heard something of one or two of the persons I had mentioned, and he offered to cooperate with me in my search for Pauline if I would consent to submit to him certain reports that I had received from my agents. This I did not hesitate to do.

Two weeks ago Mr. Westfall invited me to this dinner, and at that time he expressed the belief that he would be able to number among his guests the young woman whom I had known as Meschid's daughter. He has kept his word, and now, in the presence of those who have heard the story of my adventures, I offer to her who inspired me with the determination to undertake them the love, name, and fortune which, many months ago, I offered to her in the London house of Meschid Pasha.

As the Decapitated Man finished speaking, he rose from his chair and gazed earnestly toward where the Veiled Aeronaut sat with bowed head, at the foot of the table. But from the unseen lips of the heroine of his romantic tale there came no sound.

The silence was broken at length by Hewitt Westfall, who, rising, said:

"It is unfortunate that the endings of many true love stories should be so uncertain that we have to guess at them, but in this so much yet remains to be told that the story may be said to be scarcely more than begun. Even the lady to whom his lordship just has addressed himself has much to learn from others before she will be able to tell him whether or not joy or sorrow will crown the efforts he has made to win her."

The Fugitive Bridegroom, whose face now wore a grayish pallor, half rose from his seat. Glaring at the Decapitated Man, he asked, in a voice that trembled with emotion:

"Do I understand, sir, that the lady to whom you have referred as 'Pauline' is—is my wife?"

"Your wife!" exclaimed the Decapitated Man, looking wonderingly at the Veiled Aeronaut.

"No," said the Sentimental Gargoyle, in a tone of decision. "Though the lady may have given our friend, the Fugitive Bridegroom, some reason to believe that he was her husband, I protest that she is not his wife."

"And I maintain, sir——" began the Fugitive Bridegroom, impatiently.

"Well, well, let the lady tell her own story," interrupted the Nervous Physician, pettishly. "Until then——"

"Stop, gentlemen," said Westfall, calmly. "All of you shall be heard in good time, and it will be from the Veiled Aeronaut that we will hear next. But, as it is now well

after midnight, we shall be compelled to wait until we reassemble in the evening. Meantime, according to our arrangement, there must be no discussion of the subjects that are reserved for after dinner."

The guests thereupon rose, and, with bewildered faces, made their way to their respective staterooms.

Breakfast was not served until nine o'clock. The One-eyed Duckhunter, accompanied by the Decapitated Man, went out after ducks, while the Whispering Gentleman, the Homicidal Professor and the Hypochondriacal Painter sat down with Westfall to a game of bridge. The Fugitive Bridegroom and the Veiled Aeronaut remained in their staterooms, and the Sentimental Gargoyle found employment in writing verses on a little table that was placed for him near the sarcophagus containing the mummy of the Princess Tushepu, of the Twentieth Dynasty.

At three o'clock all except the Veiled Aeronaut sat down to luncheon. Dinner was served at half past seven, and, when this was finished, Westfall announced that the Veiled Aeronaut was prepared to relate the story of her adventures.

The guests then seated themselves in comfortable attitudes and the Veiled Aeronaut began her story.

CHAPTER VI

A WANDERER FROM ARABY

INCREDIBLE as my assertion may appear to you who have just heard Lord Galonfield relate his remarkable adventures, I may truly say that not at any time since the night on which his lordship told me that he loved me have I believed that his conduct on that occasion was inspired by any motive other than a desire to obtain a fortune which, I was assured, he believed would go with my hand.

Despite the fact that Meschid Pasha introduced me as his daughter, there is not a drop of Moslem blood in my veins. My mother was the daughter of Sir George Bridwell, a member of the British House of Commons. When she was only twenty years of age, she became the second wife of Prince Maranotti, the head of one of the noble families of Italy. By his first wife Prince Maranotti had a son—Victor—who was seven years old at the time of my mother's marriage.

I was born a year after my mother became the Princess Maranotti. For several months prior to my birth, the Prince's unreasonable jealousy had caused him to treat my mother with a degree of cruelty that was almost inhuman. After I was born the Prince's conduct became so unbearable that, when I was only five months old, my mother, with me in her arms, and accompanied only by a maid, fled from Italy. Her brother had been serving as an attaché to the British embassy in Constantinople, and it was to him she fled now for protection.

Upon our arrival in the Turkish capital, my mother learned that her brother, having obtained leave of absence, had set out for England only a few days before. The funds then in her possession were little more than sufficient to take her and her infant and maid to England. This course, however, she hesitated to follow. Her father was a man dominated by a strong sense of duty, and she feared that he would compel her to return to Prince Maranotti, whose vengeful disposition was likely to cause him to inflict some terrible punishment upon her. Despite her fears, she finally decided to go to London, but she resolved that if Sir George reproached her with her conduct she would seek refuge with relatives of her mother.

We were stopping then at a hotel in Pera, and, in order to elude Prince Maranotti, or such agents as he might have employed to seek her, my mother assumed the name of Mrs. Andrew Fenchurch. When her preparations for her journey were completed, she sent for a couple of carriages to take us and our luggage to the vessel on which we were to embark. Entering the first carriage, with me in her arms, my mother directed the maid to seat herself in the second, which contained articles of value, and to meet us at the quay.

As the two carriages drew away from the hotel, my mother, though wearing a thick veil, still feared discovery, and so drew down the curtains of the vehicle in which she was seated.

At length the carriage stopped, and my mother, raising one of the curtains, looked out. Instead of the entrance to the quay, she beheld the richly carved walls of a splendid courtyard. Throwing open the door, my mother called to the driver. The man made no reply, but a few moments later four negroes, seizing her by the arms, forced her to alight and enter a door which was opened at

her approach. A fifth negro, closely following the others, carried me in his arms. When the negroes released my mother, she found herself in a sumptuous apartment which, she was informed, was one of a suite in the harem of Meschid Pasha.

Too terrified to question further the black-skinned men who were stationed outside the door, my mother spent nearly twenty minutes of nerve-racking suspense. Then there entered the apartment a man about thirty-five years of age, with pleasing features and a sturdy figure. He was clad in Turkish dress, and in him my mother recognized one of the passengers who had been aboard the vessel that had brought her from Naples.

To my mother this man then made the most ardent protestations of affection. Because of the black garments she had worn since her departure from Italy, he had thought her to be a widow, and had hoped to win her consent to become his wife. My mother indignantly spurned the affection that he offered her, and demanded her liberty.

Apparently thoroughly crestfallen, Meschid retired. On the following day he told my mother he suddenly had been ordered to join the army in one of the Arabian provinces. This assignment, he said, would necessitate his absence from Constantinople for several months. He informed her, however, that during this period she would be treated with the utmost respect by the members of his household, but that she was not to make any attempt to regain her freedom. My mother, who was now a prisoner, resolved to submit to the conditions which the Pasha had imposed upon her until such a time as her brother might return to his post.

Each week English and French newspapers were brought to my mother's room by respectful attendants,

and by means of these she learned that, shortly after his return to London, her brother had married and retired from the diplomatic service. More important than this, however, were reports that Prince Maranotti, believing that there had been ample grounds for his jealousy, was convinced that his wife had eloped with one of her admirers. Accordingly he had divorced her.

When Meschid returned to Constantinople, his wooing of my mother was resumed. This time he did not sue in vain. The light came back to her eyes, and among the first of my memories were the songs she used to sing while the infatuated Pasha, standing beside the piano he had brought to her from Paris, turned the sheets of music that lay before her. In the years that followed she bore to Meschid three sons and two daughters.

Perhaps it was my mother's many evidences of affection for me, the child of her first marriage, that caused my stepfather to dislike me. But, though I knew I would never share the love that he bestowed upon my brothers and sisters, I never feared him. In his way he was kind to me. When my mother expressed a wish that I might have an English governess who should prepare me for that world that lay beyond the walls of the harem, her fond husband readily consented.

My education was as strange as were my early associations. I was taught English, French and Turkish, and soon became proficient in music and drawing. In my early youth I was inordinately fond of fairy tales. I was taught to read the Bible and the Koran, and of these the Koran was my favorite. But of all the books that were placed in my youthful hands, those which pleased me most were the works of the old Persian poets, whose lutes were attuned to the praise of Oriental loves, the songs of birds, the splashing of fountains and the voices of angels, peris

and genii who lurked amid whispering trees and fragrant, nodding flowers.

After her marriage to the Pasha, my mother was free to leave the house whenever she listed. But, whether she walked or rode through the crowded streets, there was none among those she passed who would be bold enough to imagine that the bright eyes that looked through her *yashmak,* or the graceful form that was enclosed by her *farendje* were those of a daughter of Old England, who, having been an unhappy Italian Princess, was now the contented wife of a distinguished Mussulman.

Despite the indifference of my stepfather, I think I should have been content to remain in that luxurious, song-haunted harem forever, had not, when I was eighteen years of age, a terrible misfortune befallen me. This was the death of my mother.

Then all light suddenly went out of my life. The songs which had made the harem seem to us like a corner of the Prophet's paradise were heard no more, except when, like spirit voices, we heard them echoing faintly in the dim-lighted, rose-scented chambers of our memories. No more did Meschid enter the harem with smiling lips and expectant eyes. His face had become more stolid—his gaze more abstracted and severe.

Two of my half-brothers—Abdul and Ildebrin—no longer made their quarters in the harem, and, after the departure of Ildebrin, then fourteen years of age, the place became more cheerless than before. When I was nineteen, my English governess died. I felt that I was quite friendless now.

Fond as I was of dress and jewels, with which I was well supplied, vanity never had been numbered among my faults, but there came a time when the praise of plain-spoken women visitors brought to me the knowledge that

my physical attractions were far greater than those of my dark-skinned half-sisters, who resembled their father, rather than their mother. These comparisons were always displeasing to me, for I saw that my sisters were becoming less and less disposed to mask the aversion with which I inspired them. For the first time I realized that I was living on the bounty of a man to whom I was bound by no ties of blood. Meschid was a devout Mussulman while I—half English, half Italian—had not a drop of Moslem blood in my veins.

At length there reached the harem a rumor that Meschid Pasha, who during the lifetime of my mother had no other wife, was about to wed again. I knew that he or his daughters had no love for me, and I wondered what would be my position in the harem when the new wife was placed at its head.

The star of my destiny had risen, however. Meschid had seen it, but not I.

And so it came to pass, while I was preparing to go out among the shops one morning, that Meschid entered the harem, and, by a gesture, bade me accompany him to one of the rooms where we might be alone.

After we seated ourselves, Meschid looked at me long and thoughtfully, without speaking.

"Pauline," he said, at length, "what is your faith?"

It was the first time he ever had spoken to me on the subject of religion, and I colored with embarrassment.

"My mother died a Christian, did she not?" I murmured.

Meschid nodded.

"Yes—she died a Christian," he answered, with a sigh. "She made me promise I would not make you change your faith. That promise shall be kept."

Then, after a little pause, he added, gloomily:

"Your father is a Christian, too."

I did not reply to this, and for several minutes Meschid sat looking abstractedly at the floor.

What had my stepfather come to say to me? With a fluttering heart I looked around at the walls that once had constituted a part of my mother's home. I knew that the time was at hand when I should say farewell to them forever.

"Most Moslem girls marry before they are sixteen," Meschid said, musingly. "You are nineteen, I believe."

The gates of Dreamland seemed to be opening their portals to me now, and I felt as if peris, standing at my visited my girlish fancies were gazing on me from the side, were pointing to where the heroes who so often had mystic city's walls.

"Yes—yes, I know," I faltered.

"If you are to remain a Christian, you must have a Christian husband," Meschid said.

A great fear smote me. Would there come a time when, like Giaour women, I would have to appear with my face unveiled in city streets?

"And I have one in view," Meschid added.

I was trembling violently. For better or for worse, my fate was sealed. There was nothing I might do of my own volition—nothing I could say.

Meschid rose.

"We will start for England to-morrow," he said.

Involuntarily I clapped my hands.

"For my mother's country!" I exclaimed, half-joyfully. "Ah, it must be very beautiful in England, for my mother loved it so."

A frown settled on the Pasha's face, and he looked at me darkly.

"Yes," he said, sighing as he turned away. "Yes, your

mother loved it—once. But, sometimes, I fancied she was happy here."

He left me then, and, with feverish haste, I began my preparations for the long journey on which I was to set out on the morrow.

When we had embarked on the steamer that was to take us from the Bosphorus to Naples, I laid aside my *yashmak,* but, in obedience to the command of Meschid, I had all meals served in my stateroom, which I never left without a heavy green or gray veil over my face. At Naples we boarded a train for the north, and, in due time, we arrived in England.

In London a house was in readiness for our occupancy, and I marveled much when I saw how greatly its appointments resembled those of Turkish homes. It had its harem and its selamlik, but here I had less liberty than in Constantinople, for, under no circumstances, was I permitted to leave the harem unless I was accompanied by my stepfather. We took several drives together, and on these occasions I wore one of the French gowns that constituted part of my traveling wardrobe, but I was not permitted to raise my veil, which, unlike a *yashmak,* had no opening for the eyes.

While I was in this London house I suddenly was summoned to the selamlik and there found myself in the presence of Lord Galonfield. My stepfather bade me remove my veil, and, for the first time since I was ten years old, my face was revealed to a man who was not a member of my stepfather's household.

Scarcely had I acknowledged my introduction to Lord Galonfield when I became conscious of the fact that a strange person had followed me into the room. This person was clad in a black gown and *yashmak,* but whose

face it was that was concealed by the *yashmak* I did not attempt to guess.

Believing that in Lord Galonfield I beheld the man who was to become my husband, I studied him critically. His marked admiration for me, his gentle manner and apparent manliness were not without effect. He pleased me, and I told myself that I would be content to be his wife.

When Lord Galonfield left the house, I asked my stepfather whether or not my surmise was correct. He answered, coldly, that nothing had been decided, but that it was more than probable that Lord Galonfield would ask for my hand.

I then sought information concerning the black-garmented woman I had seen.

"It is a lady in whom I have the most implicit confidence," Meschid replied. "In no circumstances are you to see Lord Galonfield except in her presence. If he asks you who she is, you may tell him that she is Ayesha, a Moslem woman to whose charge you have been confided during your residence in England. Discourage all further questioning on the subject, and abstain from it yourself."

Lord Galonfield's visits now became frequent, and, when he called, my stepfather arranged matters so that his lordship, the mysterious Ayesha and I were left together for an hour. It was only at these times that I saw Ayesha at all.

Each visit found Lord Galonfield's regard for me increasing, and at length he threw aside all restraint and, telling me that he loved me, he asked me to be his wife. I inquired whether he had obtained the consent of my stepfather. He replied that he had not, but would try to do so. Again he asked me if I loved him, but, just as I was in the act of confessing that I did, my stepfather

entered the room. Meschid, to my great surprise, bitterly rebuked his lordship for thus declaring his sentiments to me, then he ordered me to return to the harem. I was on my way thither when the idea occurred to me to address the strange woman who had attended me. Turning suddenly to do this, I saw that my companion, believing that I was on the point of entering the apartments of the harem, had removed the *yashmak*. The face that was revealed by this action was one of the most extraordinary I had ever seen—a face with long, masculine features—the face of a man about fifty years of age, and who, wearing a dark, trailing gown, at once reminded me of descriptions I had read of old astrologers.

This singular person did not perceive that I had seen him, and, almost terrified by my discovery, and fearful of the consequences of the act, I hurried into the harem and closed the door.

Having a premonition that, late as it was, my stepfather might desire to see me after Lord Galonfield left, I made no preparations to retire for the night. I was not mistaken. Twenty minutes later Meschid entered the harem.

My stepfather appeared to be greatly agitated. After severely reproaching me because I had permitted Lord Galonfield to place an arm around me while he was declaring his love, he told me that if I had been so unfortunate as to let the young Englishman find a place in my heart I must banish all thoughts of him from my mind at once.

"I had thought that he would have found your charms sufficient dowry," he added, bitterly. "But the heathen dog would have me rob my own children by yielding to him with you one-half of my estate."

My heart grew cold, and a sense of desolation entered it. Then, suddenly, a wild rush of anger and indignation

choked me. It was not I, but the dowry he sought, that had appeared so beautiful to his eyes.

"Are all men so base as that?" I gasped, as my wounded pride fluttered in my bosom like a frightened, half-stifled dove in a smoke-filled cage.

"No," said Meschid, thoughtfully, "but young men are much the same. An older man makes a more affectionate and indulgent husband. But let us have no more of England. You have seen how gray and fog-bound it is, and what we have to expect of its people. Shall we return to Constantinople to-morrow, and forget that we ever have known this grasping man they call a lord?"

"Yes—yes," I murmured, eagerly.

And the next morning we set forth for the distant Orient.

Tortured as I was by outraged love and the bitter pangs of a proud woman's humiliation, the journey homeward seemed like one long nightmare. Arriving in Constantinople, I found no one in the house of Meschid Pasha to bid me welcome. My sisters regarded me coldly or with sneers. The man to whom I had been offered as a wife had seen and rejected me.

During the month that followed my return, I saw little of my stepfather. Most of this time, a prey to bitter reflections, I remained in my room, reading or engaged in needlework.

One day there came a knock on my door, and Meschid entered.

"Here is something that may interest you," he said, carelessly, and, as he spoke, he handed me a French newspaper. Around a paragraph which consisted of five or six lines a pencilled circle had been drawn.

I saw that the article was an announcement of the death of Prince Giuseppe Maranotti—my father.

If Meschid had expected to read in my face any sign of sorrow or satisfaction, he was disappointed. I thanked him coldly, and laid the paper aside. The announcement scarcely had interested me.

On the following day Meschid visited me again. This time, to my utter amazement, he bade me put on my veil and accompany him to his selamlik—an apartment in which Turkish men receive their male friends, and which no female member of the family is supposed to enter.

Upon entering the selamlik, I perceived the figure of a man standing beside one of the windows. As the visitor turned toward me and I saw his face, I started and an exclamation of alarm escaped me.

The man before me was the one who, in the guise of a Turkish woman, had been present at my interviews with Lord Galonfield!

In a low, brusque voice, my stepfather bade me remove my veil. With trembling fingers I did so.

"Pauline," said Meschid, "this is Mr. Glyncamp, an American, who has honored us by asking for your hand."

With a little cry of pain, I shrank from the burning eyes and outstretched hand of the long, grim-featured man who now approached me.

"No—no—oh, God, no!" I exclaimed. "Do not tell me that! I cannot—I——"

My stepfather laughed mirthlessly, and then said:

"It is a little sudden, you must admit, Mr. Glyncamp. Even Galonfield disappointed her, for all her dreams of a husband have had a fairy prince for their subject. But, Pauline, my dear, you dreamt better than you knew. Your future husband has powers which are commonly attributed only to fairies. He will make you happy and, taking you without a dowry, he will give to you a home to

which you will have a better claim than that which you now have on mine."

I was now trembling so violently that, I think, I should have fallen, had not my stepfather's next words assured me that I should have a respite, at least, from the terrible fate that thus confronted me.

"Mr. Glyncamp is going on a long journey to the East, and he will not wed you until his return," Meschid went on. "It was such a journey that I made when your mother rejected my suit. When I returned, your mother was more favorably disposed. May it be so with you."

I bowed to Glyncamp, and, summoning all my fortitude, I weakly thanked him for the honor he had done me. He smiled as he told me that, having seen me, the memory of my face would be ever with him on his travels and that, therefore, I would find him looking younger on his return.

Hurrying back to the harem, I entered my room, locked the door and flung myself down on an ottoman. Convinced that life held nothing more for me now that was worth the having, I abandoned myself to despair, and thought of suicide. Then, suddenly, a new idea entered my mind.

I would flee from Meschid as my mother had fled from my father.

But to whom should I turn for aid? My mother's father and brother were dead, and I knew nothing of her other relatives. Then my thoughts turned to the Maranottis—to Victor, now the head of the house. Was he like his father? Did he, too, share the belief that my mother's flight had been due to another cause than the cruelty of her husband? Perhaps family pride would impel him to come to my relief. I would send for him.

With the marks of my tears still upon my face, I seated myself at my writing desk and wrote to the young Prince a long letter in which I told him all that I had suffered

since the death of my mother. When I finished writing, I read the letter over carefully, then thrust it into an envelope and addressed it to him at his country seat at Basselanto.

Four miserable, heart-breaking, nerve-racking weeks passed, and, as I failed to get a reply to my pitiful appeal, I again resigned myself to despair. But, shortly after leaving the house one day to visit the cemetery in which my poor mother now slept amid the cypresses and flowers, I felt a hand fall on my shoulder. Turning quickly, I beheld a woman who wore a *yashmak*.

"You are Pauline?" the stranger asked, in English.

The accents were soft and gentle, but I hesitated.

"You are Pauline Maranotti?" the woman asked again.

"Yes, madame," I answered, faintly.

"Let us walk on," the other said in a low, confidential voice. "I am from the Prince—your half-brother."

With a little cry that was almost a sob, I grasped her arm.

"He is here—in Constantinople?" I asked eagerly.

"No, he is not here," the woman answered. "He was unable to come himself, so he sent me to take you to him. There is a carriage awaiting us in yonder street. Let us hasten to it. We can talk better there."

Once more fear gripped my heart.

"How am I to know that you——" I began, but the veiled stranger interrupted me.

"Come with me to the carriage," she said quietly. "You shall be convinced before you confide yourself to my care."

When we were out of view of Meschid's house I saw a closed carriage with two horses standing in the street that my guide had mentioned. At the step of the carriage my companion paused and took from her pocket a little leather case. She pressed a spring, and a cover, flying

open, disclosed within a beautiful miniature surrounded by a lock of dark brown hair. It was an exquisite portrait of my mother, painted before my birth. I had heard her speak of this gift that she had given to the Prince on her wedding day, and I knew that the lock of hair was her own.

With a little sob, I turned to my guide.

"You may take me where you will," I said.

The woman who had come to my rescue was Mrs. Woodson, an American, who, with her artist husband, long had lived in Rome. She was a few years older than my mother, whom she had known prior to her marriage to Prince Maranotti.

A few days after my flight from Constantinople, Prince Victor Maranotti welcomed me in Rome. I found my brother to be a singularly kindly and handsome young man, and the moment I looked upon his face, I knew that a merciful fate had led me at last to a natural protector.

After listening to my story, the Prince informed me that, in the circumstances, it would be better for me to remain incognito in Rome until the following week, when it would be necessary for him to start for the United States where he had extensive business interests.

"In America, for a time, at least, you will be safe from the persecutions of Meschid and his friend, Glyncamp, of whose strange performances I often have heard," he said. "There are several reasons why it is better that you should not assume the title of Princess Pauline Maranotti now."

What the reasons were, he did not tell me, but I suspected that, despite his friendliness, his family pride prevented him from publicly acknowledging as his sister the daughter of a woman who, having deserted his father, became the inmate of a Turkish harem.

Little did I think when I saw the shores of America

rise from the western horizon that here awaited me a new and no less alarming series of misfortunes. I had been fleeing from persons and circumstances which threatened my undoing, but the objects of these fears were known to me. Now, however, I was about to be confronted by conditions which, though constantly threatening me, were involved in mysteries which no art of mine would enable me to fathom.

A few hours before we sighted land, the Prince, seated beside me in a corner of the deck that we had to ourselves, gave to me a clearer idea concerning his plans for me than he had vouchsafed before.

For many years my father had been heavily interested in the development of American mining properties, some of which had yielded him large profits. He had not made these investments in his own name, however, and his principal representative in these transactions was a man named Trevison, who now was well advanced in years, and childless.

Assuring me that it was in my interest that I should not assume the name of Maranotti, the Prince suggested that, as Paula Trevison, I should be known as Mr. Trevison's daughter. Then he added:

"If you are believed to be the daughter of this old man, who is now pretty close to the grave, you will find yourself in a well-defined position, from which, by reason of your natural charms and your various accomplishments, you may steadily advance. Nearly all the large fortune which Trevison is handling over here, and which really is mine, is believed to belong to him. I will so arrange matters that, after his death, it will appear that you have inherited from him a sum sufficient to give you a comfortable income. Meantime, whenever I visit the United

States, I, assuming the name of Trevison, as I am doing now, may be recognized as your brother."

"You will be known by a false name over here, only in order that you may aid me?" I asked, suspiciously.

The Prince laughed gaily.

"Oh, no," he said. "Even if I had not brought you with me I would have to be known as Trevison."

"I am afraid I do not understand," I murmured, wonderingly.

"Well, then, I will explain," the Prince went on more gravely. "I am only doing what was done by my father, but in a slightly different way. On his visit to this country he always represented himself as old Trevison's brother. The reason for it was this: Poor as it is, Italy still retains much of its ancestral pride, and it has not been confronted with the spectacle of the head of a noble family engaging in commercial pursuits. Yet, for more than a quarter of a century, such pursuits have made the house of Maranotti one of the most influential in the kingdom. But the Maranotti who followed these pursuits has been known in America as a Trevison. In the United States his identity was unknown. In Italy, none of the nobles know the name of Trevison."

On the day of our arrival in New York, my brother and I, who were registered at our hotel as 'Thomas Trevison and Paula Trevison,' met the man who had a rightful claim to the surname. He was very old—almost eighty I should say—and his face had an almost unearthly pallor. In a shaking voice, he greeted my princely brother with a familiarity that startled me.

"Well, Tom, the old man beat me out in our race for the grave," he said. "But I reckon I'll be spry enough to let out a few links that will make him think he's standing

still, after I catch up with him on the other side. Are you going West this trip?"

Shocked by this old man's gruesome jocularity, I was glad to escape from his presence. That evening, however, we dined together in a fashionable restaurant where the irreverent patriarch seemed to be perfectly at ease. He was frequently addressed respectfully by men who passed our table, and to several of these he explained that I was his daughter.

"She's just back from Europe where she's had a few foreigners completing her training," he said. "Most people think Europe's the best place to get female metal out of our Western ore, so Paula's been passing through the mill over there. Doesn't look as if it did her much harm, does it now?"

My brother smiled as if he saw some humor in this sort of thing, but I, shocked almost beyond the power of expression by the roughness of it all, felt my face flush hotly as I heard the person addressed chuckle good-naturedly and mutter compliments which, while frank enough, perhaps, were devoid of delicacy.

The following day my brother told me that, as he found it desirable to visit the West, where some of his mining properties were situated, he had arranged that I should spend a few weeks in the Adirondack Mountains, with a widowed niece of Trevison's. He had been assured that it was a delightful retreat, and that its isolation was of a nature to commend it to us.

Having determined on this course, our preparations soon were made for the journey. As we were passing along the station platform, between two waiting trains, a strange thing happened. The click of a car window, suddenly raised, attracted my attention and a man's head and shoulders were thrust out.

With a little exclamation of alarm, I drew back. The man's face was the most grotesque I had ever seen. His eyes, turned suddenly to mine, held my gaze. In the very ugliness of this stranger there was something that fascinated me.

"What is the matter?" asked my brother, who observed that I had stopped.

Quickly recovering my presence of mind, I laughed nervously, and said:

"It is nothing, but I never expected that I would see a live gargoyle. In those wonderful mountains to which you are taking me, I shall not be surprised to encounter peris and genii."

My brother, whose quick eyes had by this time discovered the face that had caused me such consternation, laughed lightly as he replied:

"By Heaven, you are right! The man is a veritable gargoyle."

I heard the window close with a slam, but I did not look over my shoulder to assure myself that the strange creature was no longer there. All during that long journey to the mountains, that weird, unearthly face haunted me. I saw it staring at me from the shimmering waters of the Hudson. It took form among the giant boulders and wooden summits of the Catskills, and, at eve, I saw it lurking among the great cloud-curtains that folded in the sunset.

Not until near the close of the second day of our journey did we arrive at our destination, and, ah, how may I describe the splendid spectacle that then revealed itself to my eyes?

Alighting from a "buckboard," one of the most torture-inflicting vehicles in which man ever traversed rough

mountain roads, I found myself on the pebbled margin of a turquoise lake that was dotted everywhere with lily-pads, whose white and yellow flowers sifted into the virile, pine-odored air a perfume that was as fragrant and langorous as the breath of love.

Walled in by great mountain slopes, from the sides of which rose larches as lofty and majestic as cathedral spires, I felt as if I were standing in an enchanted valley. The mountainsides were thickly wooded, and here and there great seams of granite were visible through rifts in the deep, green foliage, so that the valley had the aspect of a crystal-bottomed basin wrought out of a single emerald that had been inlaid with silver tracery. Among the trees fluttered birds unlike any I had ever seen before, but their sweet, full-throated songs seemed to be no more than the pattering of raindrops on the surface of a sea of silence—a silence so weird and illimitable that, appalled, I felt as if I were standing in the vestibule of infinity.

Dazed by the wild splendor of my environment, I felt as the Emperor of China might have done when from his window he for the first time beheld the splendid palace which genii hands had wrought for Aladdin in a single night.

I was roused from my trance by the sounds of strange voices. Then I saw two strangers, clad in rough garments of countrymen, approaching to take charge of the horses that had drawn our two buckboards through the mountains.

As I looked around for the house which was to be my home for the next two weeks, I saw a large, squat structure built of logs. In the door of this stood a portly woman, with gray hair. Despite the charms and reassuring isolation of this mountain retreat, a suspicion that this

log-house was the dwelling to which I had been consigned filled me with alarm. I had been told that among these mountains deer, bears and other wild animals were numerous, and the general aspect of the building recalled pictures I had seen of assaults made by Indians on the houses of white settlers. Were there Indians here?

The motherly face of the elderly woman, who was now approaching, partly reassured me, and I saw that the men who were busying themselves with the horses were honest-featured, sturdy and marvelously self-possessed.

The woman—whose name I was informed was Mrs. Seaver—welcomed me with the dignity of a princess in the doorway of her castle. As she led me into the log-house, I gazed about me with the most lively sensation of pleased surprise. The place was as carefully kept as a palace hall, and in the charming rooms through which she led me I beheld all the luxuries of Western civilization—a piano, pictures, shelves of books, the heads of animals which I had seen only in picture form, comfortable chairs, soft rugs, cosy 'dens', and beds which I thought were the whitest and neatest in all the world.

Clapping my hands with delight, I laughed as I had not done for many months.

Fanned by balsam-breathing breezes, I slept that night as, I think, I never slept before. I had never thought that in all the world was to be found a place that was capable of inspiring such a sense of ineffable peace as this.

The next day my brother left. But, however kindly I had come to regard him, I was not now conscious of a feeling of loss. The wilderness had taken me into its heart, and, thoroughly enamoured, I was happy there.

Little by little I conquered the pleasurable fear with which the dark recesses of the wood-clad slopes had

inspired me. In the course of the first three days an uncontrollable desire to see wild animals in their native haunts took possession of me. I learned to use the paddle of a canoe, and I acted like an overjoyed child when, by my efforts, I succeeded in sending the frail craft out over the shimmering surface of the lily-dotted lake. Turtles, chipmunks, sportive minnows and long-leaping water spiders filled me with delight, and how shall I describe the sensations that overwhelmed me when, as I looked out of my open window late one moonlight night, I saw three deer steal from out a leafy covert and move down to the waterside to drink?

I had been in the Adirondacks a little more than a week, when a new and greater wonder presented itself to my view. Upon awakening, early one morning, I rose and stepped to my window, as was my custom, to steal a glimpse at the great tree-crowded amphitheatre and to inhale the fresh, balsam-laden air before dressing for breakfast. My lips were framing a prayer of heartfelt thankfulness that, here in the heart of this vast wilderness, I was so far from all I feared, when something that was pinned to one of the swaying white curtains of the window attracted and held my attention. As, with wondering eyes, I leaned toward it, I saw that it was a delicately tinted, square envelope on which were inscribed the words: "For Paula."

The only person who had thus addressed me since my arrival in America was the Prince, and though the handwriting before me now was apparently that of a man, I was certain that my brother was not the writer.

The envelope was unsealed, and, thrusting in my fingers I drew out a sheet of notepaper on which were written the following verses:

TO PAULA

Sleep,
And the starlight shines,
Like Faith, among the pines,
To all revealing
Thy trust in man and maid.
And while from out the shade
Of Earth are stealing
Thy thoughts that dreamward go,
I, keeping vigil, know
Love's bells are pealing.

Wake,
And the starlight dies,
For then, athwart the skies,
Thy glances, streaming,
Do prove thou art the sun.
Now that his vigil's done
And thou art beaming,
Fond Hope doth close his eyes
But, as in sleep he lies,
Of thee he's dreaming.

Tingling with pleasure, I re-read the lines. These were the first verses I had ever read in the handwriting of their author, and a great wonder filled me as I asked myself whether, indeed, it was I who had inspired them. But this question quickly gave place to one of still greater import.

Who had written them?

I now found myself thoroughly bewildered. Except the Prince and Mr. Trevison, there was no person in the United States with whom I had exchanged more than a few, perfunctory words prior to coming to the mountains, and in my new home Mrs. Seaver and the servants were the only persons who, so far as I had been able to learn, were within many miles of me. That the lines had been written by one of the rough-mannered and illiterate man-servants, was, of course, impossible. But what other man

had been in the neighborhood? Who was it who had come to my window while I slept?

Once more the old fears took possession of me. Had I been followed from Europe by someone who——? But, no, this, too, was impossible. While there I had only two suitors—Lord Galonfield and Glyncamp. The first had sought me only for the wealth he believed me to possess, and the second had gone to Asia. Thus, except Meschid, Prince Maranotti and Trevison, all men were strangers to me.

I was only a child of the harem, however, and in Moslem harems many superstitions that would be laughed to scorn in Western households are deeply rooted in all minds. And so, assured that there was no man about me who could have written these lines, I fell to speculating as to whether or not the verses had come to me through some supernatural agency.

At breakfast I again inquired of Mrs. Seaver whether any of the neighboring valleys was inhabited.

She shook her head gravely.

"No," she replied. "We are many miles from any other house. Even the sportsmen who come to the Adirondacks for deer and bear seldom penetrate so far as this. That is one reason why I like it so."

I resumed my breakfast, and for several minutes the silence that followed remained unbroken. Mrs. Seaver was the first to speak.

"Perhaps, my dear, it is better that you should know something else," she said, hesitatingly. "What I have told you is the truth, as I understand it. I know of no other habitation than ours, but there are times when rumors reach us that some strange persons occasionally are to be seen about Deadwood Lake—a body of water that lies in the valley immediately north of ours. Who

they are we never have been able to learn. My men have seen these strangers on several occasions, but they never succeeded in getting close enough to them to describe them accurately. One undoubtedly is an aged Indian, while the second is a white youth, who, if the rumors are to be credited, is strangely handsome. These two are always together, but a third—a white man of patriarchal appearance, is sometimes observed. It is scarcely likely that you will see them, but, if you do, it is just as well, perhaps, to avoid them as much as possible."

My breath came quickly. So far from exciting my fears, this information stimulated my curiosity. Who was this mysterious young man whom my prosaic hostess had described as "strangely handsome"? If these three men were the only persons in our neighborhood who were unknown to me, one of them doubtless was the author of the verses I had received. Assuredly, the Indian had not written them, nor was it probable that the "man of patriarchal appearance" had done so. But the other—ay, it might have been this other.

The stream which filled the lake I had come to love so well, entered our valley from the north. This fact indicated that the clear waters over which my canoe daily glided were the outflow of Deadwood Lake. Then, I remembered that one of the menservants had told me that our lake was merely one link of a beautiful crystal chain that extended well back into the mountains.

When breakfast was done, I left the house and, singing as I went, I made my way to where my shining, green canoe was drawn up on the pebbled shore. One of the menservants, who was painting a fishing punt, smiled and nodded a "good-morning" as I drew near.

"You are going out to-day, Miss?" he asked.

I felt my cheeks flush slightly as I answered:

"Yes, I am going to gather some lilies for my room."

The man rose, and, as he started toward my canoe to run it down the beach, he glanced toward the southwest, and hesitated.

"I wouldn't go out far or stay too long, Miss," he said, thoughtfully. "The sky looks bad over yonder, and one who is down in the valley can't see a bad blow coming till it's on us. The weather's been pretty respectful-like since you've been here, but there ain't no other hell on earth that's quite so bad as an Adirondack storm. Does the missis know you're going?"

"No," I answered, coldly. "Mrs. Seaver has never required me to report to her anything which it pleases me to do or not to do."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I meant no harm," he said, almost curtly. "But when thunder once begins to bellow up here, it's mighty seldom a strong man can drive a boat inshore before he gets a soaking, and a soaking is the least of it. Small as this lake of ours is, it can kick up waves on shorter notice than the Atlantic can."

Realizing that I had unkindly slighted one whose only fault had been over-zealousness in manifesting a regard for my safety, I laughed reassuringly and said indulgently:

"You are right, I know, so, though I see no storm clouds, I will not go too far from the shore."

And, as my canoe glided over the shimmering lake to where the lilies were, I was resolved to keep my word. But the dancing sunlight lured me on and on, and my promise, dying like the song of a bird, went to mingle with the lily-scented airs.

The valley in which Mrs. Seaver's log-house stood was about three miles long and two miles wide, and the lake

covered three-fourths of its bottom. Well out in the lake were five or six tree-covered islets, and on one that lay furthest to the south I had discovered a little leafy nook to which I sometimes went with one of the volumes from Mrs. Seaver's shelves.

But it was not to the south that I turned this morning. At first I kept the head of my little craft toward the center of the lake, then, as my glance continued to stray curiously toward the north, I found, at last, that, half-unconsciously, I was moving in that direction.

For the first time since my arrival in the Adirondacks, I was dominated by a desire to see the stream whose waters filled the clear lake in our valley. The sun was still shining brightly, when, suddenly determining to give rein to my curiosity, I brought the bow of the canoe directly to the northward, and, in response to the determined paddle-strokes, the little craft moved swiftly over the gleaming waters.

As I approached an indentation in the northern shore I marveled that I never had been inspired with the desire to visit it before. Here the lily-pads seemed to form a great green, white and yellow rug, and the perfume of the blossoms so filled the air that it was no longer possible for me to identify the odor of the pines in the breezes which, rushing down the great mountain slopes, seemed to dally in love-rapt idleness among the langourous spirits of the flowers.

I had been singing as I left the log-house, and I was singing now, but, as I kept glancing to right and left to find places in which to thrust my paddle without breaking lily leaves or blossoms, I was singing a song that had been sung by no human lips before. It was a song in which the words of the verses I had received that morning had adapted themselves to an Arabian air that, in the

harem of Meschid Pasha, had been one of the lullabies sung by my mother to each of her little ones.

Thus singing and moving slowly through the lilies and their wide-spread leaves, I suddenly found myself at the very stream I had been seeking. At its mouth it was about a hundred feet in width, but, as I looked up along the course, I saw that it narrowed perceptibly. Laying my dripping paddle across the canoe, I stopped singing and listened.

The very air seemed motionless. Within a distant leafy covert on the mountainside at my right a single woodlark was piping its clear, sad notes. All else was so still that the very perfume that filled the air was eloquent.

For several moments a feeling of fear and awe stole over me, and I looked at the sky. There the blue hue had given place to a pinkish tint, but the sun still was shining and there was scarcely a ripple on the clear, gleaming waters over which I had passed.

Should I go back, and return some other day to explore this unknown water-course? Surely, I could find no fairer day than this. I would do it now.

Owing to the fact that the beauties of the lake and dingles so often caused me to give no thought to the flight of the hours, it often had happened that the hour for luncheon found me far from the hospitable table in the log-house. Thus it had come to pass that, whenever I left the house in the morning for a stroll or a canoe trip, I took with me, in a little net-work bag, sandwiches, cake and fruit. Fortunately I had done so to-day.

Glancing at my watch, I now saw that it was only a few minutes after ten, then, with a sigh of pleasurable anticipation, I again picked up my paddle and, more reckless concerning the fate of leaves and blossoms than I

had been before, I forced the canoe into the sluggish current of the mysterious stream.

As I proceeded, my progress became less and less impeded by sprawling lily-pads. I was now at the feet of two lofty mountains at the bases of which the stream pursued a winding course.

At length, with a little sigh of excitement and pleasure, I saw that the splendors of a second valley were being unfolded to my view.

But, ah, how different was this valley from the one I had just left behind me. The ruggedness of its lofty, bare granite precipices filled me with a half-defined sense of alarm. Over the bosom of this shining stream I seemed to have passed from one of Nature's pleasure gardens to the vast portal of one of her towering, deserted and crumbling abbeys. A chillness seemed to enter the air. The arms of the giant pine trees appeared to be gently beckoning and nodding to the unseen spirits of the valley.

But, though the valley's lofty walls thus were revealed to my eyes, of the mysterious lake I saw nothing. Ahead of me was a great expanse of tall rushes through which the stream had cut its way. Around me, however, the waters seemed to have lost their lustre. Like the mountains whose images they reflected they appeared to be dark, sullen and forbidding.

The speed of my canoe was gradually abating for, half-overcome by distrust, I was paddling mechanically.

Darker and darker grew the waters, then a greater chillness smote me. I was about to raise my eyes toward the sky when I beheld something that riveted my attention.

Before me lay the waters of Deadwood Lake and, as I looked, I shrank back in affright. Trunks and roots

of fallen trees that had been wrung from the mountain-sides by tempests or great avalanches were rotting on the narrow, gray pebbled shores. The waters were of a brownish black, and the hundreds of white-trunked birches that they reflected near their margin gave to them a weird, ghostly effect.

I was not yet clear of the masses of high rushes that grew out of the water, and the channel between them was so narrow that I could touch each green wall with my paddle. Deciding to return at once to the other valley, I was about to reverse my position in the canoe, when I beheld something so startling that I almost dropped my paddle, and for several seconds I seemed to lose the power to breathe.

What I saw was a canoe, fashioned out of the bark of birch trees, and, as I looked, it moved slowly across the thin screen of rushes that separated me from the clear surface of the lake. In this canoe were two human figures, but the appearance of each was so extraordinary that I suspected that they were indeed more than men.

The face of the figure that sat in the stern of the canoe was of a brownish-red color and, despite its wrinkled forehead and cheeks, there was something sphinx-like in its expression. The eyes seemed to be looking fixedly into a storied future that they might live to see embodied in the storied past. But the figure in the bow—ah how shall I describe what then appeared to me to be the head and body of a god?

Though I have heard enthusiastic women describe certain men as "beautiful," I never believed until that moment that such an adjective could be used appropriately to describe a man's appearance. But here was a man, scarcely older than I, whose head and shoulders would have put to shame those of the far-famed Apollo Belvi-

dere. His slightly curling black hair had the gloss which shines on the plumage of birds, and though his skin was bronzed by exposure to the weather, it had the rich, transparent coloring of youth. Never had I thought it possible that a human brow, nose or chin could be so exquisitely formed and, at the same time, be so expressive of intellectual and physical vigor. But it was the expression of spiritual virility and omniscience that gave to the classic features a suggestion of divine perfection.

"Is it god or man?" I whispered, and at that moment I seemed to have my answer from the skies.

In the distance I heard a faint, rumbling sound, then, suddenly, a terrific crash of thunder directly above my head filled me with the most indescribable sensation of awe and fear. The mountains seemed to shiver with the sound and, glancing above me, I saw great towering clouds, like enormous, gray-wreathed icebergs drifting swiftly toward the north. Among these advancing monsters lightning was glowing sullenly, at first one point and then another, then there came a flash that almost blinded me, and as, with a low despairing cry, I hid my face in my hands, a second peal of thunder rocked the dreadful valley.

Turning again toward where, only a few moments before, I had seen the birchbark canoe, I saw it had disappeared. But through the screen of reeds I beheld a sight that was scarcely less terrifying than the lightning and the thunder.

The waters of Deadwood lake had assumed an inky blackness, and were covered with great strings of froth that looked as if they had dropped from the mouth of a gigantic rabid hound. From over the mountain tops came a dull, quivering, humming sound that I knew was the voice of the advancing storm.

Half choking with fear, I reversed my position in the canoe, then, seizing the paddle, I started back toward the lake from which, in an ill-omened hour, I, a helpless woman, had been tempted by curiosity.

As my paddle strokes fell quickly and nervously to right and left, I prayed—to God, to Christ, to Allah, and to Mohammed, the Prophet of Allah. Then, with closed eyes and bowed head, I, paddling blindly, became once more a mere child of the harem, for I prayed to the two genii I had seen in the birchbark canoe.

As a child had I not learned that the appearances of genii often were accompanied by peals of thunder and vivid flashes of lightning? Did not one of the stories of the Thousand and One Nights tell how the Sultan of the Genii assumed the form of a handsome young man when he appeared to Zeyn Alasnam, the young Sultan of Bussorah? And were not those appearances invariably attended by such displays as I had seen just now, while, terror-stricken, I sat in my canoe among the reeds of Deadwood Lake?

Then, in a wild burst of self-reproach, I told myself that I was to blame for the very storm itself—that, by trespassing on these waters frequented by the genii, and stealing a view of two of them, I had invoked the wrath of Heaven.

No drop of rain yet had fallen, but the wind was growing stronger every moment. Around me the high reeds began to lower their heads as if they, too, were inspired by the fears which were overwhelming me. Like men struggling in the grip of engulfing quicksands, the reeds, tugging at their roots, seemed to be making desperate efforts to get to the shore, and, as they swayed and bent low, the little channel through which I had passed was completely hidden from my view.

Half sobbing with fright, and bitterly repenting the folly that had led me there, I succeeded in getting the bow of the canoe turned toward the shore on my right —a low, narrow strip of beach and shingle that lay at the foot of a lofty precipice. This strip I saw over the now low-lying reeds. It was only thirty feet away, but the craven reeds, huddling closer together as they sank lower and lower to the surface of the water, threatened to hold my canoe like a fish in a net.

At length, however, my desperate efforts were rewarded. I felt the bow of the canoe grate on the stones of the beach. Rising from my seat, I reeled forward and, laughing hysterically, I leaped ashore just as a dazzling flash of lightning illumined the valley, which was almost as dark as the last five minutes of twilight. I was raising my trembling hands to my eyes to shut out the glare when a nerve-racking clap of thunder drove me almost to the verge of madness.

Half blinded by the lightning and deafened by the thunder, I plunged into a cluster of young pines, hoping to find shelter there from the rain which I now knew to be imminent. The lightning was beginning to crackle and hiss in a manner which showed it was dangerously near, when, having suddenly found myself at the inner edge of the cluster of evergreens, I stood at the very base of the precipitous mountain wall. Then, as I looked, I saw something that steadied me, and, despite my agitation, filled me with wonder.

Set in the very face of the cliff was the wall of a log-house—about twenty feet wide and twelve feet high. In this wall were two glass-paned windows and a door.

Running quickly to the door, I knocked. As I waited for an answer, something smote one of my hands. I perceived it was a large drop of water, then other drops

began to fall around me, and there came another gleaming lightning flash.

The crashing, rolling thunder made it seem impossible that any one who might have been in the shelter of the log wall should hear my continued knocking, so, without further hesitation, I laid a hand on the knob of the door. The knob turned, and, with a cry in which terror and relief were blended, I ran inside.

The light that entered the dust-covered panes was so feeble that it was only when the lightning was playing that I was able to see the whole interior of the apartment I had entered so unceremoniously. This I perceived to be nothing more nor less than a small natural cave to which the hand of man had given a front of logs. Broad at its mouth, the cave tapered back like the end of a canoe, the roof and side walls coming to a point a few feet above the bare ground in the rear. At this point a curious bunk had been roughly hewn out of the massive gray granite and on this bunk lay a soiled mattress and a dilapidated oil-skin coat. Near one of the windows stood a table, the under part of which was rounded and still holding some of the bark of the tree from which it had been taken. Near the table stood two old chairs and a campstool. Against one of the walls leaned an easel which supported a canvas on which an artist had begun to paint a view of Deadwood Lake from almost the very point from which I first had seen it.

The cave was about twenty-five feet in length, and its rough aspect, as revealed by lightning flashes, was not altogether of a nature to reassure me. Still, it afforded shelter from the torrential rainpour that was now thundering down in the valley.

Convinced that I was alone in the cave, I wiped away some of the dust that darkened one of the window-panes.

As I looked out I saw what appeared to be a vast wall of water under the weight of which the very earth seemed to tremble.

And now the crashes of thunder became less violent, the lightning flashes less keen, and, despite the enormous volume of falling water, the atmosphere assumed a brighter hue.

At length the rainfall began to abate. I could distinguish the outlines of the pines through which I had fled to this place of refuge. I scraped from other panes some of the grime with which they were encrusted, and once more surveyed the apartment.

It now became apparent that this cave once had afforded shelter to a painter. Besides the easel and the campstool, I saw several maulsticks, palettes, paint tubes and torn canvases lying around the place.

As I have said, the canvas on the easel revealed a view of Deadwood Valley. The picture was scarcely more than one-fifth done, but the instruction that I had received in drawing and painting was sufficient to enable me to recognize the work of a master. Satisfied of this, and thinking to find another example of his work, I turned to a piece of canvas that lay on the ground. Like everything else in the place, it was covered with grime, but, as I turned it over, a little cry of astonishment escaped me. The partly obliterated face which was painted upon it was that of the white man, or genie, I had seen in the birchbark canoe!

I had scarcely more than recognized the features, however, when an object moving on the floor about two paces from where I stood caused me to shrink back in affright. It was a dusty brown thing, and looked at first like a piece of stout rope. But no rope moves of its own volition, and one end of this strange object slowly rose,

then, with a sudden jerk, the thing assumed the form of a coil. A triangular head moved back, and two beadlike eyes regarded me fixedly, while a broad, dark thread darted in and out of a closed, hideous mouth.

I was confronted by a serpent—a serpent which, by the description I had heard of it, I knew to be a copperhead!

For several moments horror held me spellbound, then a feeling of creepiness stole up my back and settled among the roots of my hair. Breathing heavily, I retreated slowly, rapidly gathering courage as I saw that the reptile made no move to follow me.

Glancing quickly around me, my gaze fell on an iron frying-pan that stood on a wooden stool. Taking hold of the long handle of this, I moved slowly forward toward the dark coil which, except for the nervously darting tongue, still was motionless. When I was three or four paces away from this, I hurled the pan at it and darted backward.

The pan fell upon the coil, and a moment later the reptile, with its tail beating the air, lay writhing on the floor. All fear left me now, and, seizing the stool from which I had taken the pan, I ran forward and hammered the triangular head until it lay flattened at my feet. Then, panting as a result of my exertions, I looked around me apprehensively. Might there not be other serpents lurking here?

And now a rich, mellow light began to filter into the gloomy rock-chamber, through the dusty window panes. Hurrying to the door, I flung it open. The terrible storm, as if by enchantment, had changed into a gleaming sunshower, and the air was charged with the fragrant odors of the moistened wilderness. Then, once more, my superstitious fancies took possession of me. The death

of the serpent had changed all, and once more I stood at one of the portals of Eden.

The shower, too, soon passed, and as, leaving the gloomy cave behind me, I stepped out into the warm sunshine a great feeling of thankfulness entered my heart. Looking at the watch that was fastened to my waist, I saw that it was half past twelve.

But, as I glanced toward the reeds from which I had so narrowly escaped, a new fear fell upon me. Their mattered masses were now almost covered by the swollen flood which the mountain streams were momentarily reenforcing. Somewhere in that vast tangle of muddy green sticks and leaves was my canoe. How was I to make my way afoot over the soggy ground and flooded banks to Mrs. Seaver's log-house?

I saw that for a woman to make such a journey without boat or guide was impossible. But, after all, my position was not altogether so unfortunate as it seemed at first. There was little doubt in my mind that, as soon as the lake grew more calm, Mrs. Seaver would send her manservants to seek me. Her log-house commanded a full view of the lake, and it was quite unlikely that the movement of my canoe toward the north shore had been unobserved. The men would look for me here.

Finding consolation in these reflections, I now decided to walk as far as possible in the direction of the lake in the lower valley, hoping that I might succeed in getting to some point from which I might be able to signal to those who came to seek me.

But, alas, I soon found that at a short distance below the cave the swollen waters had risen to the very base of the precipice. I returned, therefore, to the shelter afforded by the pines, for, despite the fall of the tem-

perature that had accompanied the terrible storm, the sun now was blazing fiercely.

Hour after hour I waited in the shadow of the pines, but no human voice came to my ears. Then I began to fancy that, owing to the matted condition of the reeds, the passage of a boat up the stream that connected the two lakes would be impracticable.

At length twilight fell, and, while I watched and prayed, its shadows deepened into night, and the sky was flecked with the stars; then, over one of the dark mountains, the full moon flooded the valley with its light.

A new thought came to me. Several times during the afternoon I found myself repeating, or singing to the air of that old Moslem lullaby, the words of the verses I had found pinned to my window curtain in the morning. In one of these verses the writer had written:

"And while from out the shade
  Of Earth are stealing
Thy thoughts that dreamward go,
I, keeping, vigil, know
  Love's bells are pealing."

Were these words no more than the mere expression of a poet's fancy, or did they reveal a truth? If the writer had kept vigil near the windows of my room in which I lay unthreatened by danger, was it not possible that he might be near me now in this hour of my distress? Whether he might be man or genie, I would put his fidelity to the proof.

Then, rising from my seat among the pines, I walked down to the margin of the swollen stream, and, after murmuring a prayer that, lurking somewhere in this mighty, moonlighted wilderness, my unknown lover would hear my voice and come to me, I sang his words to the sweet music of the old Turkish lullaby.

Never before had I been afforded an opportunity to test the full power of my voice, and, as I heard it rising among the lofty crags, I half forgot the object of my effort. A spirit of exaltation seemed to seize my very soul and lift it up so far above the mountain heights that I felt as if I was singing where only angel-voices had been heard before.

At length I came to the close of the last verse:

"Now that this vigil's done,
And thou art beaming,
Fond Hope doth close his eyes,
But, as in sleep he lies,
Of thee he's dreaming."

As the last note left my lips, I stood and listened. Then I started.

Was it an echo that had repeated "dreaming," or was it a human voice which, far, far among the dark shadows of the great wilderness, had called "Pauline"?

While, trembling with anxious expectancy, I continued listening, hoping that I might hear the sound again, my gaze wandered nervously to my left whence had come a sound like the snapping of a dry stick. Then my heart seemed to leap to my throat, and, gasping with fear and astonishment, I beheld him whose presence I had evoked—the white man I had seen in the canoe—the genie to whom, when under the influence of childish superstitions, some of my incoherent prayers had been addressed.

Half in the shadow of one of the pines, the strange, beautiful face of the young man was turned to mine, but on that face there was an expression of wonder that I could not understand.

Twice or thrice I tried to speak, but the words would not leave my lips. Why did this stranger remain stand-

ing thus, regarding me with such a steady, searching and unfathomable gaze? Did he not see the plight to which the storm had brought me? Why did he wait for me to speak?

At length the stranger advanced slowly toward me. His lips moved, but before the words they framed were spoken, the old Indian darted suddenly from a shadow and seized him by the arm. The white man turned impatiently.

"Your hand is on me, Glenagassett," he said.

Though he spoke quietly, there was an unmistakable note of imperious rebuke in the clear, musical voice, and the hand of the Indian fell.

"Is this a woman?" the young man asked, turning to the Indian, who, standing beside him, was bending on me a gaze that seemed to flash anger and defiance.

"Yes," replied the Indian, gravely.

The white man turned again to me.

"What brought you here?" he asked, almost roughly.

"I came this morning in my canoe, but, in the storm, it was lost somewhere in that mass of reeds."

"Why do you not get it out?" he demanded, shortly. "Go—get it now."

I looked at him in wonder. Was I talking with a madman?

As I hesitated, he shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, yes, I remember now," he said. "You women are too weak to do such things. Glenagassett, bring out the canoe."

The Indian hesitated, then, with stooping shoulders, he turned and moved quickly to the waterside.

The white man, reaching out one of his hands, firmly grasped my arm and turned me so that the moonlight shone upon my face.

"And so you are one of those creatures which men kiss and love, and for which they sell their foolish souls," he said. "I have read about you, but I never saw you. You talk with the voice of man, but your brain is that of the devil. I have never been told, however, that women sing like the angels. And so I see Nathan has again deceived me."

Suddenly realizing that I was in the clutches of a victim of insanity, I began trembling violently.

"You will sing again?" he asked.

"Not now," I faltered.

"But I bid you," he said, sharply.

"I cannot sing," I answered.

"Even now I watched and heard you," he retorted angrily. "In this valley I am lord. I am Rayon Demain. You will sing."

I saw that I must humor him, and, nodding humbly, I drew back. He watched me curiously as, raising my head, I sang, as earnestly as I had sung the other air, Arthur Sullivan's beautiful "Lost Chord."

Not once while I was singing did I look upon the man who had so excited my fears. When the song was done, however, I turned to him.

He was standing as if he had been turned to stone, and the look of wonder on his face was deeper. For several moments he was silent, then, passing a hand across his eyes, he murmured:

"If all devils are like you, it is small wonder that men confuse them with the angels and give their souls into their keeping."

A sound from the waterside caused me to glance quickly in that direction. Something was moving in the reeds, and, as I looked, I fancied I saw an enormous bird swimming to the shore. One end rose, like a great head

and neck, and then I saw that the Indian, having waded out among the reeds, had found my canoe and was bringing it to the bank.

My heart leaped within me, for I felt that the hour of my deliverance was at hand.

"You will send me home—to the log-house in the valley below?" I asked eagerly, turning to the man who called himself Rayon Demain.

He, looking at me earnestly, was about to reply when the tall figure of a man, with flowing white hair and beard, strode quickly from the shade of the evergreens.

"Rayon!" exclaimed the newcomer, sharply.

The young man turned quickly to the speaker.

"You have lied to me again," he said, angrily. "The valley in which you have kept me is so narrow and highwalled that Truth, like the sun, finds me only at noonday. I will go to where it rises and it sets, and will see and know all that lies between. In the books that you have given to me are songs that poets have sung to love, but I have known no love and, therefore, know not how to sing. And yet—to-night—I've heard——"

He stopped, and once more I saw him pass a hand over his eyes in that same bewildered manner I had observed before. Then, with his gaze resting on the ground, he went on, half-abstractedly:

"To-night I heard a voice that seemed, at first, to come to me from Heaven, but, as I listened, I knew that it was rising from the earth, and, following the sound, I came here thinking to find an angel singing. But the song was a song of love, and Glenagassett told me that the singer, so far from being an angel, was only one of those creatures which, as you have taught me, are two-thirds devil and one-third man, without a single attribute

of divinity. And now I know that the harp of life which you have suffered me to play all these years is nothing more than a mere child's toy, after all—that from it many chords are missing, and that the chord it most sadly lacks is that lost one of which this strange creature sang to-night—the chord of earthly love."

"Come!" commanded the graybeard in a hoarse, broken voice. "You have much to learn, and of this knowledge that which has to do with devil-snares is not the least. Come, like Adam in the garden, you have been subjected to the greatest temptation that can befall mankind—fruit of the forbidden tree that is offered to you by one of the daughters of that Eve whose angel beauty and diabolical mind brought shame and sorrow to thousands of generations of men."

Trembling with shame and horror as the graybeard, pointing one of his long fingers at me, branded me as one of the most despicable of God's creatures, I shrank from the strange, searching gaze that young Rayon fixed on me while his mentor spoke.

My falling gaze decided all. In it the young man seemed to read a confession of my unworthiness. When I raised my eyes again, Rayon and the graybeard were gone, but in the place where they had been standing I saw the Indian, Glenagassett, who held my canoe paddle toward me.

"Go," the red man said, and, as he spoke, he pointed imperiously toward where the bow of my canoe was drawn up on the shore.

With trembling fingers, I grasped the paddle the Indian was holding out to me. The redskin, turning from me abruptly, strode quickly toward the cluster of evergreens and disappeared from my view.

From the great wilderness around me there came no

sound. Deserted by him to whom my song had been addressed, I stood alone in the shadow of the great, dark precipice.

The story of the fall of man constitutes part of the Mohammedan story of the creation of the world, and I have often thought that in the Koran it is more beautifully told than in the Bible, but this was the first time in my life that I had been brought to know that living men believed that women of their own period were cursed with the frailities of the Eve from whom they are descended. Then it seemed to me that the moonlight lost its splendor, and each star became a stern, accusing eye, while the night-winds, sighing softly in the pines, seemed to be pitying me because, in my ignorance, I had not known that when men come alone to this great wilderness they find earthly Edens, but when woman enters them their glories begin to fade. Then the forest trees are hewn into boards for summer hotels and bungalows, and the sounds of raucous dance-music and the inane songs of music halls still forever the great hymns which Nature is ever singing in her summer solitudes. The lake yields its lilies to women's idle whims, and the lily plants, sooner or later, die like bereaved mothers. The gay-plumed singers of the forest no more voice the carols of the Spring, for the daughters of Eve, not content with their own charms, must enhance them with hats on which the feathered choristers are crucified like Him whose death agonies inspire with sorrow those wearers of stolen plumage when they assemble in Christian churches on Easter morning.

And so, beautiful as I might be, I was only a woman, after all—a prettily-tinted reptile that was an enemy to the flowers and birds—or a flame at which things that loved light and life would find destruction!

With a little sigh I had just started to walk down to my canoe when, once more, a sound coming from the evergreens attracted my attention.

It was the sound of a tenor voice that was softly singing the verses I had found in my window, and the air was that to which I had put them—the air of the old Turkish lullaby.

I started, and, fearing to meet again this strange, young man whom the graybeard had induced to leave me, I took a couple of steps in the direction of my canoe.

"Paula!"

The word was so softly spoken that I half believed I had been deluded by my fancy.

"Paula!"

I turned again to the evergreens, but no human figure met my view.

"Well?" I asked, abruptly.

"Go to the canoe and take the forward seat, leaving the paddle behind you," said the voice. "If you do not look behind you, you will be home in an hour. If, however, you turn to see your boatman, evil will result to you and him. Will you promise?"

I hesitated.

"Yes," I said.

That I was in an enchanted valley I did not now pretend to doubt. The magnificence of this stupendous wilderness, the flashing of that terrible lightning, the awe-inspiring thunderpeals, the rush of those mighty winds, the sullen rumble of the falling flood, my encounter with the serpent and my extraordinary adventure with the three men united to put to flight all the materialistic impressions that European civilization had made upon my mind during the few weeks I had been under its influence. Once more I was a child of the Orient, as the heroines of the Thousand

and One Nights had been. I, Princess Pauline Maranotti, was being confronted by a situation that was no more wonderful than those which confronted other princesses—Badoura, the Princess of China, who became the wife of Camaralzaman; Perie-Zadeh, Princess of Persia, whose brothers were transformed into black stones; and Nouronnihar, Princess of India, whose beauty had caused her three royal cousins to have extraordinary adventures.

Thus resigning myself to the superstitions of the people among whom nearly all my life had been spent, I believed that it was the voice of a genie that had come to me from among the evergreens, and that it was the genie that was to be my boatman on my journey home. But so great was the confidence with which the kindly voice had inspired me that I no longer feared to do its bidding, and, as I walked down to the waiting canoe, I resolved to guard against any incautious movement that would cause me to see the forbidden face.

I entered the canoe resolutely, and, in obedience to the instructions I had received, I sat down on the forward seat.

I had not long to wait. The crunching of the gravel and the snapping of dead reed-sticks soon apprised me of the mysterious boatman's approach. A few moments later the canoe began to move forward, then it tilted violently from side to side as the boatman entered it.

As the little craft moved on I saw that a way had been cleared for it to the channel of the stream. A more materialistic mind would have suspected that this had been done by the Indian who had brought it to the shore, but, versed in Eastern lore, I knew that the magic of my genie boatman was accomplishing all that.

Having arrived at last at the channel, the bow of the canoe was quickly swung around and, with a speed which,

in other circumstances, I would have thought incredible, the little craft, gliding over the swollen current, moved in the direction of the lower lake.

My trip up this stream had occupied nearly twenty-five minutes, for I had been paddling leisurely against a sluggish current, but now less than ten minutes sufficed to bring me to its mouth and the bright, moonlit waters of the lake below.

Thus far the only sounds that gave evidence of the presence of my boatman were the strong, even strokes of his double-bladed paddle.

A faint "hello" now sounded from the north-eastern shore of the lake. I was about to glance over my shoulder when my boatman said abruptly:

"Have a care! Remember the warning!"

A cold chill passed over me, as I replied, contritely:

"Someone is calling. Perhaps Mrs. Seaver's servants are seeking me."

"They have sought you all the afternoon, but the lake has been very rough, and one of their boats was capsized."

In my anxiety I half turned again.

"But those in it got ashore?" I asked.

"Oh, yes."

"Will you let those who are seeking me know that I am safe?" I asked.

The unseen boatman hesitated.

"No," he answered, quietly, "It is too soon to tell them now."

For several moments we were silent.

"Why did you go to Deadwood Lake?" my boatman asked.

My cheeks began to burn, but something in me told me it was best to tell the truth.

"I thought I might see the man who was described

as so 'strangely handsome," I replied. "If I had known that there were genii there, I would not have gone, of course."

"If who were there?" asked the boatman.

"Genii."

There was a pause.

"Ah, you believe in the genii, then?" he said, in a lower voice.

"Having seen them, can I believe anything else?" I murmured.

"You are from the East—the Orient?"

"From Constantinople," I answered, wonderingly. "Do you not know?"

"I know a little, but you must tell me more."

From across the widening waters came the voices of men who called my name. To these my boatman gave no heed.

"Tell me why you left Constantinople—why you are here," he persisted.

Then, as briefly as I could, I told him all.

I told him why I had fled from Meschid to Prince Maranotti and how I was brought to America and represented as being Trevison's daughter. I told him how I had received the verses in the morning and how I had suspected that the young white man in the neighboring valley was their author.

When I was done, another silence fell. Then the boatman spoke.

"You will find other verses—verses and letters at your window," he said, quietly. "You may trust the writer, but do not trust others, for I fear that great danger soon will threaten you. You did wrong to go to the upper lake to-day, but it is fortunate that you sang, for

the first song of yours brought me to your side. But you must go there no more."

"You do not speak now as you did when I first met you," I said, reprovingly. "You spoke then as if you had been taught to hate all women."

There was a long pause before he answered me.

"Unlike the others whom you saw, I am not a genie," he replied. "I am a man who is held under enchantment. When this is broken I may take my place with other men. Until then——"

"Until then?" I murmured.

"Until then I must continue to suffer."

"And how may this enchantment be broken?" I asked.

"By marriage."

"By marriage!" I exclaimed, wonderingly. "With whom?"

"With you," he murmured, softly.

I started, and once more I was about to turn my head when the strange companion cautioned me.

"You must not see me," he said.

Again the cries of the men who had been seeking me came to me from across the water. The voices were more distinct now, and the fact that my friends were drawing nearer assured me that they had seen me.

"With you," my boatman repeated, softly. "Do you pity me?"

"Yes—yes," I answered. "How could I fail to pity you?"

I was trembling violently, and even the fresh night airs were stifling me.

I now observed that, though the canoe was headed for the shore, the bow was turned toward a point that was several hundred yards distant from the log-house.

"You are not taking me home," I murmured.

"Those who follow us will do that," my boatman said. "They must not see me, nor must you tell your friends that those you saw to-day were genii. You may tell them, however, that an Indian, finding you beside Deadwood Lake, just after the storm, brought you here. You will do this?"

"Yes," I faltered.

There was a long pause. He was using the paddle more vigorously now, and the shouts that came to our ears from the pursuing boat were louder and more earnest.

The canoe was rapidly approaching the shore, and in front of the log-house I saw the dancing of lanterns. I knew my anxious hostess was preparing to set out to meet the returning boat and was wondering why the canoe in which I sat was not approaching the regular landing place.

"You will not give me your answer now?" my boatman asked.

With a little shrug of the shoulder, I said faintly:

"There is only one to give. If what you say is true—if it is only I who can make you free, I must become your wife."

The strokes of the paddles ceased abruptly, and a great silence fell around us.

"You will meet me three nights hence, at midnight, at the place at which we are about to land?" he asked in a low, eager, trembling voice.

"I am to marry you then?" I murmured.

"Yes," he answered. "But it will ruin both of us if, while the ceremony is being performed, or afterward on that night, you raise your eyes to my face. You will be there?"

"Yes, I will be there," I said.

A voice from the boat that followed cried:

"Miss Trevison."

"You may answer," said my boatman, "but do not turn your head."

"I am here!" I cried.

A few vigorous strokes of the paddle brought my canoe to the shore.

"Remain seated," said the boatman. "Do not look after me as I go. Three nights hence, at midnight, I will be here, and, except ourselves and the priest I will bring with me, no other person must know."

The side of the canoe was against the bank of a little cove. The boat rocked from side to side as the boatman left it.

"Good-night, Paula," he said.

"Good-night, Rayon Demain," I murmured, with a sigh.

And, as I heard the twigs snapping as he strode quickly into the forest, I suddenly reflected that his name consisted of two French words which, together, signified "a beam of to-morrow."

"Miss Trevison!"

Looking in the direction from whence this cry had come, I beheld a boat, propelled by two pairs of oars, moving quickly toward me. The rowers were the two men-servants from the log-house.

"I am here," I called back to them.

In a few moments the bow of the boat was against the bank.

"Who was that man that brought you here?" one of the men asked, shortly.

"An Indian," I replied.

"You have been to Deadwood Lake?

"Yes," I answered, coldly. "I was just entering it when the storm overtook me."

The moonlight enabled me to see a strange look settle on the face of the man who had questioned me.

"I told you, Jim, no good would come of it," the other muttered, surlily.

"All right, George; it's no business of ours—now we've found her," Jim said, quietly, then addressing me, he added: "Better get in here with us, Miss. We can tow the canoe better if it is light."

I got into the boat, and ten minutes later Mrs. Seaver had me in her arms on the beach in front of the log-house.

The story I told was simple. I explained that when the storm broke I had landed on the southern shore of Deadwood Lake, and, after nightfall, believing that the servants would come to seek me, I had been singing in order that my voice would guide them to me. Then an Indian had appeared, and I accepted his offer to take me to the log-house.

"Why did you go there?" asked my hostess, looking at me curiously.

"Because the north end of our lake was the only part of it I had not visited," I replied. "I saw the stream that entered it, and, through it, I paddled up to Deadwood Lake."

"You must not go again," Mrs. Seaver said, thoughtfully. "You will promise me you will not go?"

"Why, yes, I'll promise you that," I answered, laughingly.

A warm dinner was soon set before me, but I had little appetite for it. In my mind were ringing those fateful words which had been softly uttered by the unseen boatman: "Three nights hence, at midnight, I will meet you here."

An hour later, when the lamp in my room was extin-

guished, the moonlight, streaming through the open window, found me with closed lids, but my dreams were of the strange, god-like man whose name signified "a beam of to-morrow."

When I woke the sun was shining on the valley and a robin was singing under my window. My heart was beating rapidly as, half-rising, I leaned on my elbow and glanced toward the window curtain on which I had found the verses pinned the morning before.

A few moments later my feet were on the floor, and, with trembling steps, I approached the curtain on which I saw another envelope. The first had been marked: "For Paula." On this was inscribed the name:— "Pauline."

Drawing out a sheet of notepaper, I read:—

THY GONDOLIER

Glide thou o'er moonlit waters where
The lilies wake to see thee pass,
And swing their censers to the air
As acolytes at Beauty's mass;
Or move thee on the tide of dreams
In stately barge; or, if in fear,
Thou art on storm-swept lakes or streams,
Let me be e'er thy gondolier.

While Spring doth shine from out thine eyes,
While brightly beams thy Summer's sun
And loving friends around thee rise,
I'll deem my lifelong task begun.
Then, when exposed to Autumn's breath,
Other loves and faiths grow sere—
Ay, when chill Winter comes, with Death,
They'll find me still thy gondolier.

Twenty-four hours ago the author of the verses I then received was unknown to me, but now the mystery had been solved. The hand that had written the verses yesterday was the same that had penned those of to-day.

It was the hand of the mysterious boatman who had guided my canoe over the lake less than ten hours ago—the man whose wife I would be before the week was ended.

But the next morning and the next I looked in vain for the expected envelope. My heart grew heavy with fear as I wondered what had prevented the writer's coming. Had there been a tightening of the bonds that bound him to that dreadful valley? Would he be unable to keep the appointment he had made with me?"

At length the fateful night arrived. I went to my room at nine o'clock, for this was the time my hostess and her servants were in the habit of retiring. For more than an hour I tried to read, but, naturally enough, I was unable to concentrate my thoughts on a book on the eve of such an important event in my life. Time and again I asked myself what would be the result of this unreasonable act I was about to do, but not once did my courage fail me.

It was half past eleven o'clock when, after extinguishing the light that had been dimly burning, I lowered myself from my window to the ground.

Then for several moments I hesitated. The night was darker than I had expected to find it. Large clouds, moving from the northwest, totally obscured the moon from time to time, and the night breezes were freshening.

Not knowing what fate awaited me, or whether I would be able to return to the log-house, I thrust into one of my pockets a purse containing all the money I had brought with me to the mountains.

After stealing away from the house as quietly as possible, I found the path that led along the shore of the lake to the place at which I had agreed to meet my boatman. How much time it took to cover the distance I do

not know, but on arriving at my destination I was not kept long in suspense for, from the shadow of a group of low trees, there came a voice.

"Pauline," it said softly.

The voice was one that I could not have mistaken anywhere.

"I am here," I answered, firmly.

"Do you remember?" asked the voice, and I detected a note of warning in its tone.

"Yes," I said.

I heard the sound of approaching footsteps, but I did not raise my eyes.

"This is Dr. Belford," the voice went on. "He is a clergyman, and will marry us."

The ceremony was much shorter than I had expected it to be, and the words were quietly spoken. A strange thrill passed through me as the bridegroom took my hand, and I was trembling when he slipped the ring on my finger. Then, at last, I heard the fateful words:

"I do now pronounce you man and wife."

And so I had my fairy prince at last!

A great silence fell around me, then I heard the voice of the man who was now my husband.

"Return to the cottage now, Pauline," he said, gently. "To-morrow you will hear from me. It is forbidden that I should touch your lips with mine to-night, or that I should look into your eyes. But to-morrow—to-morrow——"

I heard him turn away.

"Good-night, my dear," he said.

"Good-night, Rayon," I answered, humbly.

And so on our bridal night we parted, and in a few moments I was returning to the log-house by the path along which I had come from it. I had proceeded only

a few paces, however, when from the direction of the log-house there came the sound of a pistol shot.

I halted and my heart grew still. Then I heard three other shots in quick succession. These were followed by the hoarse voices of men.

For several moments terror held me spellbound. Then, standing motionless in the path, I heard the sound of someone running toward me from the forest. Cowering with fear, I shrank behind a dwarf evergreen. The dark shadow moved swiftly past, about thirty feet away from me. This was quickly followed by another. They were men, but I was unable to see the faces of either.

A succession of women's shrieks and the cries of men now rose from the log-house. Then, looking in that direction, I saw something that brought a cry of horror to my lips.

The structure was in flames!

Still I hesitated, but the pitiful cries of a woman—cries that I knew were Mrs. Seaver's—caused me to fling to the winds all fears for my personal safety. Running and stumbling, I made my way along the path, and, as I ran, the dull, angry glow of the burning house grew brighter. I heard another pistol shot, but the only fear I felt was for the hostess who had so kindly cared for me.

At length, reaching the clearing round the house, I saw Mrs. Seaver running toward me. I called her name, but at that moment a tall man overtook her, and, seizing her in a rough grasp, started with her toward the burning house. Up the steps he ran, then, with a curse so loud that it reached my ears, the man hurled the woman through the door.

As I hurried forward, I recognized the perpetrator of the terrible act, and, in a shrieking voice, I cried:

"Rayon—Rayon—are you mad?"

The tall man turned and thrust away a second tall figure that was about to throw itself upon him. Then, as swiftly as a deer, Rayon ran to me.

Never shall I forget the awful expression that I saw upon his face as, standing before me, he looked into my eyes.

"Come—devil or angel—you belong to me now," he said, laughing roughly. "To-night I have declared myself free."

As he grasped one of my arms it seemed to me that his fingers were burning their way to its bone.

"Stop—stop—coward—help me!" I cried at the top of my voice.

The lips of the magnificent fiend again parted in a smile.

"Come," he began, but he said no more.

A powerful fist, passing before my eyes, had felled him to my feet. Freed from his grasp, I turned to the man who had rescued me.

Then I saw that he to whom I owed my release was the man whose grotesque face—a very caricature of the human visage—had looked down upon me in New York while I was preparing to board a train for the Adirondacks—the man whose almost indescribable ugliness had caused me to refer to him as "the Gargoyle."

"Are you hurt?" he asked in an abrupt, thick voice.

"No—no, but Mrs. Seaver! She——"

The Gargoyle, laying one hand on my shoulder, pointed to the milk-house, and said:

"She is safe. Go to her."

Rayon, who for a few moments had appeared to be insensible, now began to rise.

"Go!" the Gargoyle repeated, sharply.

I needed no further urging, and several seconds later

I was at Mrs. Seaver's side. She was moaning pitifully as I approached her, but, as soon as she saw me, she uttered a cry of relief and clasped me in her arms.

"Who has done all this?" I asked.

"The demons from the valley," she sobbed. "It was the Indian who set fire to the house. The other—the white man——"

James, one of the menservants, came running up.

"We can't save the house ma'am," he said quickly, "but I guess all else is safe enough now. The redskin is dead, and—oh, God!"

A look of horror overspread the speaker's face and his rifle fell from his hand. Nor did I marvel that his courage had left him. Standing near us, with the lurid glare of the fire lighting his terrible features, was the Gargoylle.

"'Tis the devil himself!" James muttered between his chattering teeth.

With a little cry of terror, Mrs. Seaver hid her face in her hands.

For several moments the strange being before me looked meditatively at our little group. Then, turning quickly, he strode off into the forest.

"Oh, James—James, you must get us away from here to-night—now!" cried Mrs. Seaver desperately. "Where is George?"

James, turning his face toward the lake, shrugged his shoulders slightly, but said nothing.

"Dead?" I asked in a trembling voice.

James faced me slowly.

"Yes, Miss," he said, quietly. "The white devil killed him—with an axe."

"And Mary?" Mrs. Seaver faltered.

"She tried to shoot him, but he was too quick for her,"

said James. "She, too, went down." Then, turning to me, he added, abruptly: "He was seeking you, Miss. I was afraid——"

I could hear no more. The ground seemed to give away beneath my feet, and, tottering forward, I stumbled and fell.

When I recovered consciousness, James and Mrs. Seaver were helping me into a covered wagon. As I looked around me, I saw the barn was in flames, the light of which had transformed the lake I loved into a great orange-colored thing that filled me with dismay.

"Where are we going?" I asked faintly, as I sank on a roll of blankets.

"We are going to leave these terrible mountains," Mrs. Seaver replied, in a strange, hard voice. "Until this hour I loved them, but I hate them now and I hope that I may never see them more. James will drive us to the nearest railway station, then he will report to the proper officials all that has happened. He will return with men to help him bury poor George and Mary. Everything we had here, except the horses and the wagon, has been destroyed, so let us go."

A week later, sitting in my apartment in New York, I read in a newspaper an account of how deputy sheriffs, seeking the outlaw, Rayon Demain, had come upon a remarkable cavern in Deadwood Valley. It was apparent that this cavern was, for the most part, the work of man. Windows, which afforded light and ventilation to the various chambers, were high up in an almost inaccessible mountainside, and were so cunningly constructed and concealed that it was not until after the secret entrance to the cavern had been discovered that their presence in the big rock wall was suspected.

The cavern contained several galleries, and there were

about nine rooms in all. In these rooms were found hundreds of valuable books, several different kinds of musical instruments, paraphernalia for the exhibition of moving pictures and a well-equipped gymnasium.

But by far the most remarkable of the discoveries made was a large collection of magnificent paintings, most of which were of an allegorical nature. These had been identified as the work of Nathan Bonfield, who, many years before, had given promise of becoming one of the greatest painters of his period, but of whom, in recent years, little was known. It was found, too, that Bonfield was a frequent visitor to Deadwood Valley, and there was some reason to suspect that Rayon Demain, now charged with the murder of two of Mrs. Seaver's servants, was some relative of the eccentric painter's.

It had been learned also that for many years an Indian, named Glenagassett, had been Demain's almost constant attendant, and that it was this Indian who had lighted the fire that destroyed Mrs. Seaver's buildings. What had been the motive that inspired this deed, no man knew. The Indian had been killed and Demain had mysteriously disappeared. Of Bonfield's present whereabouts nothing was known.

But before these matter-of-fact reports were published in the newspapers, I had been disillusioned. From the moment that the brutal Rayon had been sent to earth by a blow from a human hand, I knew how absurd had been those superstitions which, excited by that Adirondack storm, had endowed him with more than human attributes. My god-like man had degenerated into something that was little better than one of the lower animals. The outlaw, whose wife I had become, was either a monster or a madman.

As may be readily understood, the secret of my night

canoe trip and my midnight marriage never left my lips. I was resolved that not even Prince Maranotti should learn of my almost inconceivable act of folly, if I could prevent that knowledge from reaching him.

Fearful lest I should again fall into the clutches of Demain, I became anxious to return to Europe. The fear of Meschid Pasha and his friend Glyncamp no longer haunted me. Upon me Meschid had no claim, and so long as I kept away from Turkish territory it was scarcely likely that either of these enemies would make any attempt to rob me of my newfound liberty. It was as the daughter of the late Prince Maranotti I would now take my place in the world.

As soon as the young Prince, my brother, returned from the West I attempted to persuade him to allow me to go with him to Europe. To this, however, he demurred. I must remain in the United States, he said, and retain the name of Paula Trevison.

"It is here that you must marry and make your home," he told me. "Through Trevison I will make ample provision for you, but it is contrary to your interests and mine that you be known as Pauline Maranotti. The members of the nobility would not receive you, and your lot in Italy would be exceedingly unhappy."

I would not have it so, however. The result was that we quarreled and parted in anger. The following day I received a visit from the Prince's American lawyer, who told me my brother had deposited in a New York bank the sum of ten thousand dollars, in the name of Paula Trevison. This was to constitute my allowance for the year. The lawyer also informed me that on that morning the Prince had embarked on a vessel for Italy.

While the lawyer was with me, I succeeded in restraining my feelings, but as soon as he was gone a spirit of

revolt asserted itself, and I determined that I would go to England, seek out my mother's relatives and enlist their support in an attempt to assert my claim to recognition as a daughter of the house of Maranotti, and, as such, one who rightfully might claim a part of its vast estate.

Kind as he had been to me, the Prince had at last plainly given me to understand that my mother's flight from his father's cruelty was unwarranted, and that, in the interest of the family, he would be compelled to recognize me only privately as his half-sister. In short I was to be dependent on his benevolence for that financial aid to which I had an hereditary right. This, together with the light manner in which he had set off for Europe, without coming to bid me farewell, had thoroughly angered me, and from a sense of respect for my injured mother, as well as from a sense of my individual rights in the matter, I was determined that this masquerade as Paula Trevison should cease.

Having taken this resolution, I decided to act in accordance with it without delay.

Looking over the advertising columns of a newspaper, I saw that a large steam yacht had been chartered by a tourist company for an early Autumn cruise among the British Isles. I never had been aboard a steam yacht, and it occurred to me that perhaps on such a vessel I would be less likely to be seen by anyone who had known me before. It was not such a vessel as a friend of Glyncamp's or Meschid's would be likely to take, nor was it probable that the fugitive, Demain, would embark on such a trip. I saw that I could leave the yacht at any of its stopping places, and as these, for the most part, were not likely to be regular ports of entry, I might the more easily succeed in escaping detection.

The vessel was to sail on the morrow. Accordingly I drew from the bank the full amount that had been deposited there to my credit and took passage on the steam yacht, *Highland Lady.*

Except for one incident, this voyage was uneventful. Near the close of our fourth day out, we sighted a derelict that lay almost directly in our course. As our yacht drew near this ill-fated vessel it was seen that it had been ravaged by fire, but from the charred staff over the stern a white cloth was fluttering, and a closer inspection showed that a rope was trailing from one of the davits. Believing, therefore, that some living person still might be on the helpless vessel, our captain sent four men in one of the yacht's boats to learn whether survivors were aboard.

On the derelict one man was found, and never shall I forget the spectacle he presented when, haggard and delirious, he was brought aboard the *Highland Lady.* He was taken to one of the staterooms, and, heartily pitying the poor fellow, I asked the yacht's surgeon if I could do anything to aid him.

The offer was made impulsively, and I was a little startled when the doctor said:

"Why, yes, Miss Trevison, you can help me, if you will. He has a bad scratch on one of his arms—from a piece of metal, I suppose—and, if we don't give it treatment at once, it is likely to cause considerable trouble."

Then, asking all others, except a stewardess and myself to leave the room, the doctor prepared to dress the injured arm. After a careful examination, he said he would have to lance it. He, therefore, asked me to hold the arm while he performed the simple operation. While he was preparing for this, the physician's attention was distracted by the sound of a concertina, which, played

by a little son of one of the passengers, had annoyed many persons during the voyage. The doctor, stepping to the door, directed that the concertina be silenced. He then turned to his patient.

All was over in a few minutes, but, while I held the arm, the delirious man struggled desperately, and never will I forget the look of horror I saw on his haggard face. When the lancing was finished the doctor washed the arm and, after applying some sort of ointment, he bandaged it.

When all was done, I left the stateroom, just as a steward entered it with a bowl of steaming broth.

Later in the day, when I stopped at the stateroom door to learn the condition of the patient, he opened his eyes suddenly and, seeing me, he accused me of being a vampire. When I visited the stateroom on the following morning he repeated the strange charge. Then, learning that I was the only visitor whom he had addressed in this astonishing manner, I discontinued my visits.

The *Highland Lady* was to make her first stop at the Scilly Islands and, as it was scarcely likely that the sufferer would find good hospital treatment there, he was transferred to a vessel bound for Liverpool.

Shortly after this, upon picking up an English newspaper that had been published only a day or two after we had taken the stranger from the *Hannibal*, I saw an account of how an American ship captain had sent a man aboard the *Hannibal* in order that he might be able to report on the derelict's condition. This man had found no one on the vessel. As his visit had been made more than a week after the burning *Hannibal* had been abandoned by its crew, and before it had been sighted by the *Highland Lady,* the fact that the presence of the famished man we took off had not been discovered, struck me as

extraordinary. It did, however, account for the unburned rope which we had seen trailing from the davit.

Upon my arrival in England, the few surviving relatives of my mother received me coldly, and were frank enough to tell me that the treatment I had received from the Prince was better than I had a right to expect. Then, reluctantly deciding to abandon my determination to insist that I should be formally acknowledged as the late Prince's daughter, I returned to the United States.

In the vessel that brought me across the Atlantic I met a young woman, about my own age, who was the wife of Adolph Janot, an aviator and the inventor of an improved seaplane which then was being subjected to a series of tests by the government. Mrs. Janot and I became great friends, and, when we arrived in New York, it was at her suggestion that I took a small suite of rooms in the apartment hotel in which she made her home. Several times, in the course of the weeks that followed, Mr. Janot invited me to go up with him in his big seaplane, but, unable to conquer my strange fears, I always declined.

Correspondence between the Prince and myself soon completely effected a reconciliation, and when, a few months after our parting, he found it necessary to return to the United States, it was arranged that he should be my guest.

It was while the Prince still was on the Atlantic that I saw in a newspaper a report of the death of Rayon Demain. According to this, the young man, who then was passing under an assumed name, was slain in Arizona in singularly mysterious circumstances. Concerning his identity, however, there was not the slightest doubt.

The report was brief and I read the lines without emotion. My love for this misguided man was only

an incident of a long midsummer night's dream, after all. His physical perfections, his verses to me and the words I heard him speak while he guided the canoe across the moonlit lake had captivated me. Taking advantage of my superstitions, he had caused me to become his wife, then, in an hour of inexplicable madness, he had assumed the aspect of a fiend, and I had learned to loathe him. So lightly had I come to regard that midnight marriage that it was difficult for me to realize that in the eyes of the law I was a widow.

When my half-brother and I met again we became even better friends than we had been before. He told me something, however, that disquieted me. Lord Galonfield had been seeking me in Europe, and had caused the Prince to be informed that he had obtained possession of the Rajiid diamonds which, according to an arrangement with Meschid Pasha, were to constitute the price of my hand in marriage. The Prince gave the young nobleman no information concerning me.

Like me, the Prince was passionately fond of the better class of music, and, during the six months he remained in New York, we frequently went together to musicales and the opera. It was at the Metropolitan Opera House that I first saw Philip Wadsworth, a well-to-do young man, who was destined to play an important part in my life.

The circumstances incident to the manner in which Mr. Wadsworth wooed and wed me have been related by that gentleman himself.

Several times I had been puzzled by his occasional periods of abstraction, but on the day of our marriage I was wholly at a loss to account for his remarkable display of nervousness, and, during the ceremony, I observed that some of his responses were uttered almost as if he were speaking against his will. His increasing

haggardness in the cab that took us to the pier startled me, and then, for the first time, I fancied that I saw in his face something that was suggestive of a face I had seen before. But it was not until he entered the state-room, just before the vessel left the pier, that I recognized him.

The haggard face of my husband was that of the delirious man who had been taken from the derelict, and in his eyes was the same expression I had seen in them when he had called me a vampire!

Then, as if in confirmation of my discovery, there came to my ears from the pier the sound of a concertina. Several times, while the rescued man was on board the *Highland Lady,* passengers found it necessary to rebuke the irrepressible boy whose playing of a concertina near the sick man's room was likely to disturb his rest.

Deserted by the man who, scarcely more than an hour before, had made me his wife, I continued on my way to Europe. There a cablegram from the Prince recalled me to the United States. Upon my return I was informed that Mr. Wadsworth had mysteriously disappeared, leaving no explanation of his desertion of me.

My brother's anger and indignation knew no bounds, but, fearing that if the affair got to the attention of the public, his true name might be revealed, he decided to institute no legal proceedings against the man who had so cruelly deserted me.

When the time arrived for me to bid farewell to the Prince, I went down to the pier with Mrs. Janot to see him off. On my return to my room, I found among the letters the postman had brought during my absence an envelope addressed in a handwriting that drove the color from my face.

I quickly opened the envelope, and, as I drew out the

sheet it contained I saw it contained more verses from the hand of Rayon Demain!

With a cry of anguish, I sank insensible to the floor.

When I recovered consciousness, Mrs. Janot was bending over me. As, in her sympathetic way, she asked me the cause of my trouble, I shrank from her in dismay.

What would this good woman have said if I had told her I was a bigamist?

The following day I received other verses, and a letter. Neither bore the hated name, however, for they were signed "Thy Gondolier." The letter informed me that the writer was in New York, and he besought me to receive him when he called at three o'clock on the following afternoon.

I had rented my apartment furnished, and three trunks were sufficient to hold all my personal property. These trunks were quickly packed, and, four hours after I had received the verses and letter, I left the house.

I went first to a modest hotel, and then rented and furnished a flat in the northern part of the city. The only persons who knew my new address were the Janots and the Prince's lawyer.

For several weeks I was undisturbed, then I was completely prostrated by the report of the assassination of Prince Maranotti, at Basselanto. The news came to me through his American lawyer, who informed me that two men were suspected of the crime. Of these, one was a man whose features were those of a "laughing devil," and the other was a cousin of the man who was slain.

The description of the first man was so similar to that of the man known to me as the "Gargoyle," that I could scarcely doubt that it was indeed this person who had committed the act. I had heard the Prince speak once of a cousin in America—"a helpless sort of a fellow," he

said—whom I might chance to meet one day. He advised me, however, not to take this man into my confidence.

Assured by my legal adviser that my claim to the Maranotti estates was indisputable, I placed the matter entirely in his hands. He then decided that, for the present, at least, it would be better for me to remain in the United States while he went to Italy to consult with legal authorities there. Two days after my lawyer sailed, a cablegram from Italy was received at his office. The cablegram yielded the information that the will of Prince Maranotti had been found and that he left all the Maranotti estates to me.

Five days have passed since my lawyer left New York. During the first three I remained in my apartments. Yesterday afternoon, however, Mrs. Janot invited me to take an automobile trip with her to Rockaway where, at the aviation station, her husband was going to try out one of his new seaplanes. Believing the trip would improve my spirits, which were somewhat depressed because of my long seclusion indoors, I accepted the invitation.

Arriving at Rockaway, we were welcomed by Mr. Janot, who, in a launch, took us out to the new seaplane. Not suspecting that any attempt would be made to take me on a flight against my will, I was easily persuaded to board the big machine and seat myself in the fusilage. For several minutes Mr. Janot explained to me the nature of the mechanism by means of which the seaplane was controlled. While I listened, a mechanician was oiling one of the great motors.

With a suddenness that completely bewildered me, the whole structure began to vibrate and I was almost deafened by the sound of the motors' exhaust. I turned to protest, but in the roar my words were inaudible. Mr.

Janot smiled grimly and avoided my gaze as he continued to manipulate the mechanical devices with which he was surrounded.

With ever-increasing speed, the plane now was moving over the surface of the water; then I saw we were rising. Slowly my resentment died away. As we sped onward and upward, I closed my eyes. Again I found myself under the spell of old Arabian tales. One moment I felt like Sinbad in the talons of a roc; another, and I was mounted on the back of a flying steed, and then I would fancy I was nestling on the crooked arm of a great, black, Sphinx-faced genie, who, with the speed of a comet, was traversing the star-strewn wilderness of the night. Nor did the mighty coughing of the motors' exhaust find vulnerable the all-pervading ecstasy which filled my mind with visions of the wonders of Mohammed's Paradise.

From time to time I looked down at the wonderful panorama that was moving under me. I caught my breath as I saw scores of clusters of toy-houses, and woods and fields, and the sea, wrinkled and gray, stretching out to the horizon.

But, suddenly, my fears overwhelmed me again. The coughing of the motors ceased and I was conscious of a faint sensation of sinking. Looking down, I saw there was land below us—a great expanse of greenish-yellow meadows, lined with many gray creeks of various sizes. Toward these meadows the seaplane was gliding, apparently heading for a big barge that was moored to a bank of one of the larger creeks.

It was near the mouth of one of the creeks that we came to water. Scarcely was the seaplane at rest when Mr. Janot and his mechanician began making a collapse

boat ready for service. As I looked at them wonderingly, Mr. Janot said:

"Something serious has happened. The motors are overheated and the machine is unsafe. We must get you ashore at once."

Two or three minutes later I was in the boat and Mr. Janot rowed me to the shore. He helped me to land. As he stepped back into the boat, he said:

"The condition of the plane is such that I dare not ask you to return to it. I think you will have little difficulty in getting to a railway station, with the assistance of someone you will find on the barge yonder." He paused, then added: "When we meet again, you will understand, and will not blame me for leaving you in this unfortunate situation. Good-night."

Speechless with astonishment, I watched him row back to the seaplane. Soon after he boarded it, its exhaust sounded again and it took the air.

The declining sun warned me that if I was to get to the railroad before nightfall, it would be necessary for me to act quickly. Not far from me was the barge I had seen in the course of the seaplane's descent. I was about to go toward this when I heard the discharge of a gun, and saw the fall of several ducks that had been flying overhead. Thinking that the man who fired the gun was from the barge, I hurried toward the bank which concealed him from my view. Reaching this, I saw him in a little boat, and to him I appealed for aid in getting me to the railroad. This, he thought, could not be done at night. Thanks to his courtesy, however, I soon found myself on this barge where I was welcomed by Mr. Westfall. I was compelled to remain against my will, but already our host has partly convinced me that it was well I did so. Painful as have been the narratives of the

three gentlemen who have proved that I have been responsible for the grievous misfortunes that have befallen them, I willingly await the stories to be told by the others, with the hope that what they have to tell will lift forever from my unhappy life the clouds of mystery and fear which now envelop it.

As the Veiled Aeronaut finished speaking, all eyes, flashing with disapproval and curiosity, were turned toward the Gargoyle, whose ever-smiling face was partly concealed by one of his long, white hands.

"Well, sir—well?" demanded the Nervous Physician, irritably. "We are now prepared to hear your explanation, I believe."

The Gargoyle, drumming nervously on the table, glanced interrogatively toward Westfall. But before the millionaire had time to speak, the Fugitive Bridegroom, leaning across the table, addressed the Aeronaut.

"Then my—my doubts—my horrible suspicions—were only the results of delirium, after all," he said, in a hoarse, broken voice.

"Of course, of course," replied the Nervous Physician. "Isn't it clear enough to you now? There is scarcely an hour in the day when some delirious man or woman in New York is not receiving such impressions. A man whose bare feet get below his bedclothes on a Winter's night will dream that he is in the Arctic regions, and to a dreamer incidents which seem to occupy hours will pass through his mind in a few seconds. Science has shown that in a five-minute dream a man may read a three-volume novel. Most men know this, and, when delirium is passed, they have sense enough to put aside the fantastic impressions they have received. You, however, have hoarded yours, with the result that you have made a

fool of yourself, and have withdrawn from this inestimable young woman the protection she had a natural right to expect from you. I have no sympathy for you, sir—none. Now let us hear what this miserable Gargoyle has to say. Why don't you speak, sir?"

"Stop!" commanded Westfall sharply. "In no circumstances, Doctor, is any of my guests to be subjected to insult while on this barge. The Gargoyle awaits your apology, sir."

The Homicidal Professor leaned forward.

"We are to understand, then, that the appearance of the Princess on this marsh, and so near this barge, is not to be regarded as a coincidence?" he asked, impressively.

Westfall shook his head gravely.

"No, it was not that," he said. "Having learned that her highness was on friendly terms with the Janots, I persuaded the aviator to bring her here at the time and in the manner she appeared. Our plan had been carefully arranged. But, Doctor, I have reminded you that the Gargoyle is expecting an apology."

"Well, let him have it, then," snapped the nervous physician, as the Homicidal Professor again settled back in his chair. "I apologize now, sir, but, in time, I may withdraw my apology."

"We will now hear the story of the Hypochondriacal Painter," said Westfall.

The Hypochondriacal Painter stroked his white beard meditatively for a few moments, then, in a deep, mellow voice, he began:

CHAPTER VII

THE IMAGE OF GOD

The story which I have to tell will be briefer than the others you have heard, but it is the story of twenty-three long, delusive years. It is the story of an ambition that was reaching up to Heaven when, like Babel's tower, it succumbed to confusion, and fell crumbling to the earth.

My father, dying just after I became of age, left me a large, carefully invested fortune, and if I had acted in accordance with his last wishes I would have addressed myself to commercial pursuits, as he had done. But Art had enthralled my mind, and I made my home in Paris where I studied painting under several masters.

From the first, fortune favored me, and critics already were beginning to refer to me as the most promising painter that the New World ever had given to the old. My head was turned, and I aspired to climb to artistic heights that few men had been bold enough to try to scale.

I conceived the idea of a great painting that should be my masterpiece. In this the central figure was to be the Deity, Himself. For more than two years I sought a model for this wonderful figure, but my search was vain. My idea had its inception in the scriptural authority that "God created man in his own image." I sought the perfect man. During this period I made hundreds of sketches, trying to evolve from many models points of perfection that might be embodied in an harmonious whole.

I had no suggestion from any of the old masters to aid me. Every deity that the world has worshipped has been, at some time and in some manner, represented by the reverent hands of sculptors and painters. But few Christian sculptors ever attempted to give form to Him who made man in His own image, and these few were content to imitate the ancient conceptions of Jove.

Late one New Year's Eve, I knew that I had failed, so, collecting all the sketches I had made, I hurled them into my fireplace. Then, with a sharp knife, I went to the end of the studio where stood the great canvas, with its background partly painted, on which I had designed to place my conception of the wonderful image.

I mounted a stepladder, and was about to thrust the knife into the top of the canvas when a sound, coming to me from the hall, caused me to hesitate.

It was the cry of a new-born child!

I knew its parents. The father had died six months before this plaintive cry, even now, had reached my ears. He had been an unfortunate artist, and had left his widow so destitute that I was contributing to her support. She was nearly forty now, and, in her youth she had been very beautiful. But poverty and care had extinguished many of her former charms long before this, her first, child came into the world to share her life of misery.

A new idea now flashed into my mind, and, as I thought, I slowly descended the ladder.

Half an hour later, when I laid the gleaming knife upon my table, the canvas was still untouched by the blade, and in that still, grimy old studio it remains untouched at this very hour, for no foot has crossed the threshold since that fateful New Year's Eve.

I took the infant from its dying mother's arms, and

before the first month of the new year was ended the babe was in the United States. Here I confided it to the care of a New England woman who, for two years, cared for it as if it had been her own.

I had been shooting and painting in the Adirondacks several years before, and, profoundly impressed by the grandeur of its great mountain fastnesses, I thought that somewhere among them it might be possible to find one which no human foot, unguided by mine, would tread for a quarter of a century.

I now determined to search for such a valley, and, taking with me Glenagassett, the most perfect type of Indian manhood I had ever met, I set out on my quest.

In course of time, we came to what is now known as Deadwood Valley. There I found a little natural cave, and across the front of this Glenagassett and I built a wall of logs. Then, returning to New York, I took the two-year-old child, and, retracing my steps through the mountains, I found myself again in the valley. Here I gave the child into the care of Glenagassett.

To the Indian I then confided my purpose. I told him that this child was Rayon Demain—"the beam of to-morrow"—that he was the son of the Great Spirit, himself, and that he should come to possess all the Great Spirit's powers should he attain his twenty-third year without seeing the face of a woman, or exchanging words with any man whom I did not take to him myself. Amid these solitudes the child should be taught that he was lord of all, and that when the right hour came, his supremacy over nature and man would be fully proclaimed.

The boy, Rayon, was to be taught the language of the forest as Indians had been able to understand it. He should be impressed, too, with the belief that the storm, the waves and every living thing in the wilderness were

daily beseeching him to exert in their behalf his godlike, dormant power.

I told the Indian also that not until the boy was ten years old would I see him again, but that at that time, when his forest education was done, I would bring other teachers.

All this was in accordance with a theory that I had formed—a theory that the human mind is the sculptor of the features and poise that express its meaning. In short, that if a man is to have the facial expression of a god, he must think as a god, and have god-like things to look upon.

When the workmen left the valley, Rayon and Glenagassett reentered it. While he was away the boy had seen no face other than that of the Indian.

When the lad was ten I visited him. I saw Glenagassett had done well. Whether Rayon talked, walked, ran, or swam in the dark lake, his grace, dignity and self-possession amazed me, and, always clean-minded and with more than even a proud man's self-respect, he already had begun to develop the most remarkable beauty I ever had seen on a human face.

I then had a new and more spacious rock chamber finished, and I sent to Rayon teachers whom I could trust to carry out the delusion I had been so carefully fostering in his mind. Believing me to be a messenger of the Great Spirit, his father, he corresponded with me, reporting to me on what he had learned each day. The books, music and pictures I sent to him were carefully chosen, and were of a nature to encourage in him a belief that he was superior to the human race.

When the boy was eighteen I began to visit him more frequently. Amazed by the manner in which my theory was working out, I began to feel myself inferior to this

strange youth, whose mind was dominated by a sense of power, and into whose heart no guile had ever entered. There were times when even I was half-tempted to share Glenagassett's belief that the youth really possessed divine attributes.

At length, when the boy was twenty, I assured myself that I would have only three or four years more to wait, and that then the marvelous figure would at last find its place on the big canvas in my closed Parisian studio.

Clouds at last began to rise above the horizon, however. In the valley below Deadwood lake a woman established a summer home, and brought several servants with her. Glenagassett wanted to burn the log-house then, but, fool that I was, I forbade him to do so. I was beginning to be confident of Rayon's own power now.

Rayon had just entered his twenty-second year when, on a visit to the valley, I learned that a beautiful young woman had passed through the mountains. The Indian feared she was going to live with Mrs. Seaver.

"Shall I kill her?" Glenagassett asked me, eagerly.

But—still a fool—I told him 'no'—to wait and see.

One day, while I was sitting in the cavern, there came a violent storm. I rose, and, walking to one of the windows, I watched the tempest as it rocked and threshed the valley. When it was over I lay down and slept.

When I awoke a sweet, strange sound was coming to me through the window I left open. Rising quickly I hurried to the window and listened.

It was a love-song—sung by a woman whose voice, stealing through and over the silent wilderness, was as beautiful as an angel's.

Hurrying down the shore, I ran like a madman toward the place from which the voice was rising—the very spot

on which I stood when I first delivered the little Rayon into the keeping of Glenagassett.

It was a long, hard scramble that I had undertaken, and my way lay over soggy mounds, shifting stones and fallen trees. Branch after branch smote me as I ran, until, with my strength all spent, I was compelled to pause before I reached my destination.

The first song had ceased, then, after a pause, the voice of the singer rose again. She was singing "The Lost Chord."

Once more I staggered on, and, when I came upon the singer, I saw that Rayon stood beside her in the moonlight, with a hand resting on one of her arms.

Despair suddenly gripped my heart as I realized that the woman was no less beautiful than her wondrous voice!

My effort to draw Rayon away was successful, but, all the way back to the cavern he strode ahead of me, gazing sullenly to the ground.

At the cavern entrance he turned.

"Are all the devils as fair as that?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"No, no," I answered, gravely. "The fairest has been sent to tempt the strongest man."

He looked at me long and steadily.

"If you have deceived me, you must not live longer, Nathan," he said; then, as if thinking aloud, he added: "I will see, I will see."

That night the cavern chambers were too narrow to hold my thoughts, so I went out into the valley, and for more than three hours I walked alone beneath the stars.

Returning to the cavern I woke Glenagassett.

"The women must leave the valley below," I said.

"They shall go," Glenagassett answered.

Not once on the following day did Rayon speak to me. At night he retired early to his chamber.

The following morning, when I saw Glenagassett, I said:

"The women are not gone."

"They will go to-night," he replied, gloomily.

I nodded, and passed on. That day Rayon started off alone, but the Indian followed him. In the evening Rayon came to me.

"Does the Prince of Evil always look like the pictures we see of him, Nathan?" he asked.

"I think so," I answered. "But why do you ask me that?"

"Because I've seen him," he muttered, thoughtfully. "He haunts her every night, and——"

"Haunts who?" I asked.

"The woman."

"Well, may he take her, then!" I retorted, irritably.

"Do you think he will?"

"I have not the slightest doubt that he will get her eventually," I muttered.

"The Prince of Darkness must be tamed," he said, gloomily. "We'll see to that—Glanagassett and I."

Half-choked by emotions of anger and fear, I looked at him several moments, without speaking. Rayon was looking down the valley toward the stream through which the waters of Deadwood Lake pass to the valley below.

"You have been going to the log-house at night?" I asked.

"He is always there," Rayon went on moodily, "and, night before last, I met him face to face. Nathan, what is fear? How does one feel, who has it?"

"He feels as you must never feel, Rayon," I replied, looking at him wonderingly.

"Is it a shrinking feeling—a feeling that a man might have if some great eagle fastened its talons in his head and was jerking out all his thoughts? Is it a thing that traps his voice, and holds down his hands when he would raise them—that grips his feet like boggy places?"

"Yes—yes," I faltered. "But——"

"Then I have felt it, Nathan," he went on, gravely. "I have been a coward."

"In Heaven's name, Rayon!" I began, but, with one of his imperious gestures, he silenced me.

"For the last two nights, while you thought me sleeping, I have been in the other valley," the young man said. "When I went there on the night I saw the woman, a strange thing happened. I had it in my mind to seize her and bring her here, where I might look at her and make her sing whenever it pleased me to hear her. But in the log-house there were many windows, and, while I stood in a shadow, wondering which might be the window of her room, I saw a figure that I took to be a man steal around the corner of the house. Leaving the shadow, I walked toward the figure. It turned, and, when I saw its features, I knew it was no man. It was the Prince of Darkness, himself."

"Come—Rayon, Rayon!" I muttered, protestingly.

"It was he, and no other," the young man said, with an appearance of the most unmistakable conviction. "And, as I looked at his grinning, triangular, black-bearded face, I felt that thing which, as I know now, was fear."

"Did he speak?" I asked, sharply.

"Not there. For a long time—it may have been one minute or thirty, but I felt as if it would never end—he kept his gaze on mine. I could not tell whether he had expected me, or whether my coming had taken him by surprise. The evil smile on his hideous face revealed

nothing. His awful eyes held me as a serpent's holds a bird's. Their beams burned like brands. Though he was smiling, no muscle of his face had moved. He stood like a thing of stone."

Thrill after thrill passed over me. Was Rayon crazed, or had he, indeed, seen this hideous thing A great chill smote me as I saw that drops of perspiration were gathering on the speaker's brow. Ay, it was plain that fear had come to him, at last. For the first time, in many years, I remembered that he had had a mother. The creature I had labored so long to invest with divine attributes had woman's blood in him, after all. He who created man in His own image made the first of our race All-Man. It was not until the first man learned to love a woman that there came into the world those strange hybrids who were to people it—men with some of the weaknesses of women, and women with some of those higher, and partly divine, attributes, with which God invested man.

After a pause, Rayon went on:

"At length the creature looked toward the open window he had been approaching when my footsteps attracted his attention. For a few moments, the fear passed from me, and, with my eyes, I tried to measure his strength. I saw that he was as powerful as I. I think I should have thrown myself upon him had not he turned again to me so soon. Then my will left me. He pointed to a dark, heavily timbered spot in the forest, just beyond the clearing. Like a child, I did his bidding, and, as I walked, I heard him following slowly.

"At last I heard his voice. It was so different from yours or Glenagassett's—so much like my own—that it startled me.

" 'Let us stop here,' he said.

"I halted, and, as I turned to him, I saw his back was

to the narrow shaft of moonlight that came through a rift in the mass of foliage above. Of this I was glad, for, if we were to talk, I would not be compelled to see his face. But I soon knew he had not taken me to that dark place to hear me speak.

" 'Among these mountains there are many valleys, and no man is lord of all,' he began. 'The valley above is yours, to have and to hold until that man comes who shall cast you out. But this valley belongs to me, and I hold it by virtue of a stronger will than your own. When you leave it now, take with you the knowledge that, if you return to it, the old impious fool who so long has deluded you, will never again look on the living form of Rayon Demain. Now go.'

"As he spoke, he turned from me and moved quickly into the darker shadows that lay around us. But if he thought that I, standing in the moonlight, did not see him take a revolver from his pocket, he did not know that my eyes could penetrate far darker shades than those in which he stood to watch me.

"I was unarmed, and, having felt that thing which comes over forest animals when men approach them, I knew that you had lied to me—that, after all, I was only a man, and would die like a deer, or bear or stricken bird if this strange being discharged his weapon at me. And so I did his bidding. I came back to this valley, and, as I stole hither, like a scourged hound, I heard stealthy footsteps following me as I went. I knew they were the footsteps of him who had taught me how to fear. It was not until I entered the valley that I knew my enemy had turned back.

"But, though I had walked that night as one who did the bidding of a master, my thoughts were not those of a coward. Nor were they the thoughts of one who was

still a fool. I knew many things I had not known before. I knew that I was only a man—that he whom you have just told me was the Prince of Darkness was only a man; that when my enemy had spoken of 'the old impious fool' who had so long deluded me, he meant you—you, whom I have known as Nathan—you who would have a creature who is capable of feeling fear believe himself to be a god."

As he bent his gaze on me now, I shrank appalled from what I saw. His eyes were burning fires in which seemed to be generated the white-heated hate that was trembling on his face.

The man whom I had striven to make god-like had become an angered demon. In the Babel I had reared the confusion of tongues already had entered. Fear and Hate had gained admission, and I, the trembling architect, felt as if it were too late for me to escape from the tottering walls before they fell.

For several moments, confronted by that great hate, I doubted not that the man it had mastered would take my life. But his will fought back the fires, and once more a look of sullenness settled on his face. Then he spoke as quietly as he had done before.

"And so, knowing these things, I knew that the devil-faced creature, who had triumphed over me while I was unarmed, would have to die—that I must kill him before I would be able to get the woman," he went on. "That is why I went again to the log-house last night. Hour after hour I sat in the fringe of the forest, watching for the man I had gone there to slay. But he did not come. I would have taken the woman then, had I not believed that he might follow and take me unawares while I had her in my arms. But, whether or not he comes to-night, I will bring the woman here."

Trembling with astonishment and anger, more than fear, I laid a hand on one of his broad shoulders.

"Rayon—Rayon—are you mad?" I gasped.

Drawing back, he laughed harshly. Then, with a sudden movement he reached forward and, grasping me with his powerful hands, he raised me from the ground and held me out at arms' length, shaking me as if I were a child.

"Yes, mad—mad—mad—you old fool graybeard—mad!" he cried. "But I am not half so mad as you would make me."

Then, with a wild, rough laugh, he flung me to the ground with such force that, writhing with pain, I could not draw a breath.

When, at last, quivering with physical pain and mental anguish, I scrambled to my feet, I saw I was alone.

Raising my voice, I feebly called the name of Glenagassett. There was no response. Where had the Indian gone? Had I not told him to keep Rayon always in his sight? As my strength returned to me, I called louder.

Then suddenly I remembered that when I last had seen the Indian, earlier in the day, he had told me that the women in the valley below would "leave to-night."

I never had known Glenagassett to break his word. How he designed to get the women away I did not know. It was a subject that I had feared to think upon, but I knew the next morning would not find them there.

Glenagassett undoubtedly was in the lower valley, and Rayon was now well on his way thither. What would happen if they met?

Into one of my pockets I slipped a revolver, then, with long, eager strides, I set out along the path that led to the valley below.

My strides soon quickened to a run. Then, losing breath, I slackened my pace to a walk again. On and on

I went—now walking, now running, until Deadwood Valley was well behind me. At length, however, I heard a sound that brought me to a halt.

It was the sound of a pistol shot, and, as I listened, others broke the stillness of the night.

I had not far to go, and, as I ran, I dropped the burden of my years. A mighty resolve had hardened my heart and steeled my sinews. As I pressed on, the revolver that I brought with me was in my hand. The woman who was the cause of all this mischief should die, even if every bullet that I might fire should pass through her body into the heart of Rayon Demain!

I heard the shouts of men, and I knew that it was no one-sided battle that was on. Glenagassett had told me that the old woman's two menservants were well-seasoned forest men of the same hard stuff of which the Adirondack guides are made. I had seen these from a distance, and I knew that neither of them was the "devil-faced" man Rayon had encountered. Who this stranger was I was unable to guess.

Shots and shouts ceased suddenly, then I heard a woman's shrieks. These encouraged me in the belief that, thus far, victory lay with Rayon—or Glenagassett. It was the triumph of Glenagassett for which I was hoping now.

Suddenly, a dull, red glare began to steal through and over the forest trees. The odor of burning wood was in my nostrils. A wild, quavering, exultant cry issued from my throat, for I knew that the victory lay with Glenagassett—that it was mine.

From the log-house now there came no sound. The cries of the frightened women were still, and the fire glow became so bright that I could see distinctly the outlines of the boughs under which I was passing. Among the trees

and bushes, however, the inhabitants of the forest were astir. Birds and squirrels had scented that which they dread even more than man—the smoke of an Adirondack forest fire.

Suddenly I remembered that I was old. My strength was spent, and my heaving chest felt as if it were filled with molten metal. My limbs were palsied by the violence of the unwonted efforts I had required of them. As I tottered on, the revolver fell from the hand that had been grasping it. I stooped to pick it up. I saw it gleaming—gleaming at my feet. I touched it—fell, and felt the damp earth against my throbbing temples.

"I will sleep," I murmured. "All is well. Glenagassett has triumphed, and the woman—the woman——"

Ay, I slept, and when I woke the sun was shining.

So stiff was I in every joint and muscle that even the slightest movement gave me pain. The atmosphere was laden with the dank, heavy odor of burnt wood, but I saw no smoke.

Rising weakly, I looked around me. I had fallen in the forest, near the edge of the clearing that surrounded the log-house. But now I saw that the log-house was gone. A mass of black, faintly smoking embers was all that was left of the picturesque little home that an honest, nature-loving old woman had built here in the wilderness beside the still smiling lake.

But the blackened fragments of the log-house and barn were not all I saw. Lying in the clearing there were other objects, and, as these met my view, I knew they were human sacrifices that had been laid before the altar of my ambition.

All unmindful of the pains that had been racking my body and limbs, I passed from one still form to another. The first I saw was that of poor, devoted Glenagassett.

The two others apparently were the bodies of servants—one a man and the other a woman. Of Rayon, of the woman who had owned the log-house, and of the young woman who had been her guest there was no trace.

One thing, however, was certain, and the knowledge of this made me a coward. Murder had been done, and those who sought the persons who were responsible for the night attack might, even now, be on their way to this valley. Thus, in the sunset of my wasted life, I was nothing more than a wretched criminal, for, though I had not been present when these three hapless beings were slain, I was as responsible for their deaths as if they had fallen before the revolver I had taken with me to the spot.

Had Rayon succeeded in getting the young woman to the cavern, after all? Did he know that, whether he had done this or not, the law would seek him out and punish him? Should I not go to the cavern and tell him of his peril?

I shook my head.

No, neither Rayon nor the woman was anything to me now. If he still lived, he was young and I was old. I had failed in all things. Let him work out his destiny alone.

Beside the body of the manservant lay his rifle, and around the waist was a cartridge belt. After taking possession of these, I knelt down beside Glenagassett and took from one of his pockets the flint and steel with which, for many years, he had kindled all his fires. Then, after one long, last look toward Deadwood Valley, I plunged into the wilderness, nor did I emerge from it again until the songbirds had taken flight for the Southland, and the frost was causing the nuts to drop from the trees. When I returned to civilization, it was at a point

far distant from those from which I had been wont to approach Deadwood Valley.

Since the day I found Glenagassett's body, it has been only in my dreams that I have heard the voice of Rayon Demain. But I knew that he did not die in the Adirondacks. From time to time newspapers published accounts of efforts that had been made to capture him. At first, he was sought only as "the Adirondack murderer," but later other crimes in distant parts of the country were laid to his charge. How a man with such a striking face and figure could succeed in escaping capture, I could not understand.

At length, however, newspapers reported a misadventure that befell him in the West, and through them I learned the name of one who was able to give me the details of the affair. That gentleman, replying to a letter which I wrote to him, told me a story which is little less remarkable than the one you have just heard from my lips. He is that guest who is known to you as the Duckhunter, and you doubtless soon will hear from him the strange facts he has to tell.

The eyes of all except two of the guests were turned toward the Duckhunter. While the Hypochondriacal Painter had been speaking, the Aeronaut had drawn her veil over her face again, and, from that moment, those who glanced toward her saw that not once was her gaze turned from the Gargoyle. As if conscious of this fact, the Gargoyle sat with his head bowed. His right arm rested on the table, and his right hand shielded his eyes and part of his face.

There was a little pause, then, as no one seemed inclined to speak, Westfall nodded toward the Duckhunter, who forthwith began his story.

CHAPTER VIII

ON DESERT SANDS

THOUGH the story you have had from the lips of the Hypochondriacal Painter is one of a weight of woe that was accumulated in the course of twenty-three long, wasted years, I doubt whether the mental anguish it has excited in the mind of its narrator is greater than that which, coming to me in a single hour, has blighted all that remains to me in life.

My vocation is one of the most unfortunate that a man may follow, for it leads me among unpleasant places in my search for unpleasant men. In short, then, I am a member of the United States Secret Service. In that service, a specific order is as immutable as one of the laws of nature, and this is one reason why its members are chosen so carefully. It is because I, a graduate of West Point, and for many years an army officer, have always regarded an order of my chief as superior to any law of man or State that my position in the service is second only to that of the chief himself.

My connection with this wonderful series of adventures, which have been described to you by guests here present, began with an order which came to me from my chief immediately after I disembarked from a vessel which had brought me from Japan, where I had been engaged on a secret and highly important mission.

This order directed me to proceed without delay to

Arizona, and there assume charge of a party of our men who had traced to that State one William Farnley, whose beautiful wife had been identified as a member of one of the most clever and desperate gangs of counterfeiters that this country had ever known. While Farnley was not suspected of being able to produce a counterfeit note himself, there was little doubt that his wife, who was thoroughly infatuated with him, had found him an apt pupil, and that it was on these two persons that the other members of the gang relied for the exchange of bogus notes for good notes in a manner that would not subject them to suspicion.

Both Farnley and his wife had been arrested in Chicago, but the man, who was an exceptionally powerful fellow, killed two of his guards with a jack-knife, and escaped. He was traced to Omaha, and thence the trail—a pretty well-defined one, for Farnley was a chap whose striking physical characteristics would attract attention anywhere—led to Arizona. There one of our men had overtaken the fugitive on the edge of a desert, and was shot, living only long enough to write and pin to his breast a note telling how and at whose hands he had come to his death.

The man thus stricken had been an old comrade of mine, and as, a week later, I stood on the edge of that arid plain on which no tree or watercourse offered itself to view, I had a double motive in running down the man I sought. Not only would I be carrying out the orders of the department, but I would be avenging the death of my friend.

I set out with a half-breed Indian. Beside the mules we rode, we had three pack animals which carried a light tent, forage and large skins filled with enough water to supply us for the next twenty hours. Our desti-

nation was Spirit River, a stream that runs through the heart of the desert, and which could be reached only by a thirty-five mile ride across the blistering sands. It was to that river that I now had to follow Farnley's trail. The trail was fresh, for he had set out from this very point only a few hours before.

The start was made at four o'clock in the afternoon. It was two o'clock when I had engaged Jim, the half-breed, for the journey. He was sober then, but, as he mounted now, I saw that he had been drinking—how heavily I did not know, but when a man has a hot desert ride before him, every gill of whisky in his stomach constitutes a serious handicap. However, it was too late to protest, and too early to excite the ill-will of the only man who was available for the purpose for which this one had been employed.

Owing to the intense heat that prevailed, our pace was moderate. I had allowed twelve hours for the journey. In order that it might be successful, it was essential that we arrive at Spirit River while it was dark, otherwise our approach over the desert scarcely could fail to be observed by the man whom I was planning to surprise.

By eight o'clock we had covered sixteen miles of our journey, having proceeded at the rate of only four miles an hour. The sun had gone down and the air, while far from cool, was now becoming more endurable. I decided, therefore, to make a halt and feed and water the mules, giving to the animals a half an hour's rest before calling on them for the increased efforts that would be required of them when our journey should be resumed.

For the last hour, Jim, the half-breed, had been muttering incoherently. When I addressed him, however, he spoke rationally enough, and I thought that, by the time we were in our saddles again, the rest and decreas-

ing heat would enable him to work off the ill effects of the liquor he had taken.

I now directed him to picket the mules, and aid me in relieving them of their packs. He accomplished this task in sullen silence, but, while we were feeding and watering the animals, he began to address me in an Indian jargon which I was unable to understand. As I watched him, he gesticulated violently, and several times pointed in the direction of the unseen river.

All my efforts to get the man to speak rationally were vain, so, with one hand on my holster, I shrugged my shoulders resignedly and continued to keep him under observation.

At length, when the packs were replaced on the mules, and we were ready to mount again, I saw his hand move to his revolver. I quickly drew mine—aimed and pulled the trigger.

The hammer fell on an empty chamber. The half-breed, with his weapon pointed at my breast, laughed tauntingly, but held his fire.

Again I pressed my trigger, and again the hammer clicked.

"One mule—you; four mule—Jim."

As the half-breed spoke, I knew that, while we had been making preparation for our journey, he had withdrawn the shells from my revolver. To offer resistance to his will now meant certain death to me. Crazed as he might be, he still was sufficiently master of himself to shoot straight, for the hand that held his weapon was as steady as a boulder on a valley bottom.

He bade me cast off my belt and move away two hundred paces, and I did so. I felt no fear of death, but it was not death the Service had sent me out here to find; it was a man. I saw I must bide my time.

True to his threat, the mongrel devil left my mule and rode off with the others. When he was gone, I mounted. I was unarmed now, so I saw that nothing could be gained by riding off after the half-breed, who, doubtless, had friends near. Accordingly, unarmed as I was, I turned the head of my mule toward the distant, unseen river, and, guided by the little compass which I always carry with me, I resumed my quest alone.

I found the going easier than I had expected, and was fortunate in having under me one of the sturdiest animals it ever had fallen to my lot to ride. The moon was three-quarters full, and, though a haze overhung the desert, the light was fairly good. Shortly after midnight a faint, silvery line ahead of me gave me to understand that a few minutes more would find me at Spirit River.

At length, I slipped from my saddle and stood on the bank of a broad, shallow stream that was filled with rocks around which the sluggish tide made scarcely a ripple. Along each bank extended a fringe of dwarf trees. It was to one of these trees that I hitched my mule, after I and the beast had drunk our fill from the river.

Near the spot at which I had dismounted was a curious burrow which consisted of a hole scooped in the sandy bank and roofed with the trunk and branches of small trees over which had been spread a layer of stones and river mud. Near the door of this little dug-out I saw a pick and shovel and a prospector's pan. But there was something more, and, as I looked at it, a slight feeling of creepiness stole over me.

A few feet distant from the entrance to the burrow, and lying at full length on the ground, was the body of a man.

A mere glance at the swollen face convinced me that

this was not the fugitive I sought. It was the body of a man of middle age, and there was little doubt in my mind that he was the prospector who had occupied this rudely constructed dwelling. On his breast was pinned a piece of soiled paper. Removing this, I entered the hut and struck a match. Then I saw that on the paper were written the following words:

Dide on or bout 5 August Ime Jack Cline and my wife an kids is Mary Cline, Conedale Ohio broke leg in shaf and it swel offul. Mule croked las week so will I. Bury me desent if you kin. Looks like theres dust hereabut but I aint struck mutch yet. So long.

As I examined the body, I was convinced that the poor fellow had died of gangrene the day before. Picking up a shovel that was near the entrance to the hut, I dug a shallow grave. To this I was dragging the body when a sudden, rattling sound near me caused me to step quickly aside. I was too late, however. Before I was able to see the thing that threatened me, a rattlesnake had buried its fangs in the outer side of the calf of my left leg.

I killed the reptile, then, glancing at the grave I had dug, I muttered:

"Well, I suppose I'd better make it big enough for two."

With my handkerchief and a stick I made a tourniquet above the wound. I was tightening this when I heard a voice ask, quickly:

"What are you doing there?"

I turned deliberately, and I gave no start or other sign of recognition as I saw that he who stood near me, with a revolver in his hand, was the man I had gone out to the desert to take, dead or alive.

"A rattler has just bitten me," I explained, as quietly as the other had asked the question.

"The devil!" Farnley muttered, in a sympathetic voice. "What are you doing for it?"

"Holding off the end a little while," I replied. "That's all a fellow can do under the circumstances."

"You fool, why don't you suck out the poison?" Farnley asked, impatiently, as he returned his revolver to his belt.

"I can't reach it," I answered.

"Who's that man—the dead one?" Farnley demanded, suddenly.

"My partner—Jack Cline. We were prospecting here. His mule fell in the desert, and he broke his leg. Gangrene got him and he's all in now. I brought him here on my mule, and was burying him when I was bitten."

"You were prospecting for gold?"

"Yes," I answered.

Farnley was now on his knees beside me. In a few moments he had rolled up the left leg of my trousers and was pressing his lips to the wound.

For five minutes he worked zealously, sucking out the poison. From one of his pockets he took a large flask of whisky and placed it in my hands.

"Drink it all," he said, as he tightened the tourniquet.

As I gulped down the liquor, he added, cheerfully:

"You'll be all right now, my man. Have you any coffee in your shack?"

"I'll see," I said, and started to rise.

"Stop!" he exclaimed. "I'll go."

He found it, too, and, while he was preparing the steaming draught, I watched him moodily. I had been told that the fugitive I had been assigned to find was characterized by remarkable personal attractions, but, despite this information, I was astonished by the man I

saw. Never had I gazed on human features that were so splendidly moulded or which expressed such a degree of intelligence and self-possession. Though his figure was that of a magnificently developed athlete, his movements were as graceful as those of a girl. Nature had endowed me well with strength, but, as I watched Farnley now, I knew that in a struggle I would be little more than a child in his hands.

Never before had I been racked by so many conflicting emotions. In the aspect of the man was something that made me shudder. While he was speaking to me, a peculiar charm seemed to invest his speech and movements, but, as he bent over the fire that he kindled, there crept over his features a gloomy, sinister expression, and once he frowned darkly as he glanced in my direction.

At the time this handsome murderer had come upon me, undoubtedly I was in the grip of death. Though he had given my life back to me, that life belonged, as it had done for twenty years, to the Service, and, as I sat there, I knew that when the Service once gets after a man it is bound to land him sooner or later. I knew, too, that this man's crimes meant death to him. I might let him go now, but he would be a fugitive until the inevitable end when he would expiate on the gallows the death of my old comrade.

At length, absorbed in his preparations for supper, Farnley laid aside the belt to which his revolver was attached. I watched it with fascinated eyes. Once more he went into the hut—to get forks and sugar. When he came out I was looking at him from over the barrel of his revolver.

His handsome face grew as dark as a thunder cloud.

"What the devil is all this?" he growled.

"It means that I, Roger Canbeck, am a Secret Service

officer, and that I hereby arrest you, William Farnley, on three charges of murder," I replied.

For several moments he gazed at me steadily, then he looked thoughtfully at the ground.

"Well, what is it you want me to do?" he asked.

"You must ride with me to-night across the desert."

He broke into a laugh—so light and boyish that it startled me.

"No, no—not that," he said. "It is only in his own way that Rayon Demain now plays the fool. The time is passed when others may direct him."

As he finished speaking, he leaped toward me. My finger trembled on the trigger, but I felt I could not press it. A moment later, a fork in the hand of my adversary was thrust into one of my eyes. I staggered back, and as he reached to seize the revolver from my grasp, I drew the trigger. Groping at his bosom, he slowly retreated a couple of paces, then, with a groan, he fell.

Racked with pain, I looked down on him with the single eye that remained to me. I saw him as through a mist. He was lying very still, but, by the movements of his eyelids, I knew that the strange, warped soul had not yet forsaken its splendid tenement. As I gazed across the moonlighted desert, the revolver fell from my nerveless, trembling hand. The venom which those fast-whitening lips had sucked from my flesh was far less deadly than that which my stern sense of duty had injected into my soul. The honor of the service had been vindicated, the death of my comrade had been avenged, but I knew that from that hour I would be unable to wash the stain of ingratitude from the life which this dying man had given to me.

As my gaze fell to him again, I saw he was looking at me, and was smiling feebly.

"All things do not happen in the manner that the prophets have written," he said, "and so you have come too late to keep from Rayon Demain the knowledge that it is better to be a sinful man than a proud, arrogant and unloving god. There was a time when an old man deceived me by causing me to believe that one day I would possess the attributes of divinity—I, who would never win the mastery of my own soul. But the love of woman I have won—that is all, and it has been enough. And so, you see, wisdom came to Rayon Demain at last, for, like the butterflies, he lived his season among Life's flowers, and you shall know that when he died he had learned that even evil women are not devils, and that, despite old men's teachings, there is good in everything."

Scarcely conscious of the action, I knelt beside him. With a little laugh, he held out a hand to me. Sobbing like a child, I took it.

"You are sorry," he said, speaking now with an effort. "But—it is all right, after all. The desert was all that was left to me; there is more for you, and, sometimes, when a woman's eyes grow bright while you are speaking to her, think kindly of him who gave back your life beside that grave in which you will lay me now."

"Why did you resist me?" I whispered, hoarsely.

"Because, like all other men I have ever known, you stood in my light. It was only by resistance that I earned my brief day of sunshine. I am content."

With a little sigh, he turned his head. His eyes closed, and I knew that all was ended—that for Rayon Demain the bright sun would rise no more.

It was not until twilight fell again that I left the little green belt in the desert. I buried the two bodies side by side, but, as I set out on my return journey, there seemed to ride beside me one whose glorious eyes, black

curling hair and lordly figure have haunted me from the hour I felt a cold hand fall from mine as I knelt on one of the dark banks of Spirit River.

As the one-eyed Duckhunter finished speaking, a low groan escaped the lips of the Hypochondriacal Painter, and the Aeronaut hid her face in her hands. For several moments the silence was unbroken. Then, in rasping accents, the Nervous Physician said, abruptly:

"We will hear from the Gargoyle now, I suppose."

Westfall nodded gloomily.

"Yes, my friends, if that is your pleasure," he answered, with a sigh.

The Sentimental Gargoyle lowered the hand on which he had been leaning, and which had concealed his eyes while the Duckhunter was speaking. Then, in a soft, penetrating voice he began:

CHAPTER IX

THE QUEST OF THE BEAUTIFUL

It is unfortunate that, with a physical appearance so repellent that it is wont to inspire dislike before others of my attributes are known, I should be further handicapped at the beginning of my narrative by the fact that every reference made to me by those whose stories have preceded mine has seemed to invest me with a malevolent influence.

Profoundly interested as I have been in the adventures which we have heard described on the Barge of Haunted Lives, you readily will understand that it was inevitable that the story of the Hypochondriacal Painter should impress me most, because of its exposition of the theory that human features owe their contour to the quality and activity of the human mind. Though the Painter, dedicating all those years to its demonstration, appears to have been the first to attempt to endow man with the physical attributes of divinity, the theory long has been accepted as a fact by physiognomists.

It does not require the discernment of a carefully trained observer to find in the portraits of famous men the expression of those qualities which made their work distinctive. How strangely like, in their suggestiveness of that mental power that finds expression in analysis, are the features of Michelangelo and Auguste Rodin! Who would look upon the pictures we have of Newton, William Blake and Swedenborg without knowing they were

ever peering into the rumbling depths or up at the mist-enshrouded altitudes of the infinite? Who would find aught but the spirit of a conqueror behind the visages of Caesar, William of Normandy, Richard I, Peter the Great and Napoleon? In the faces of Scott, Byron, Tennyson, Mozart, Chopin and Beethoven how simple it is for us to see and identify their temperamental differences in the fields of poetry and music, but when we come to look upon those of Carlyle and Schopenhauer can we be blind to that which they express—that hopelessness which comes to men, who, having sunk their ideals in the turbid current of materialism, recognize only the follies and sorrows of our world?

When we think upon all this, it would seem, my friends, that it is a law of Nature that physical and mental grace must go hand in hand, and, indeed, careful observation will assure us that, so far as men are concerned, physiognomy, in nine cases out of ten, is a fairly true index of character. As indicative of feminine qualities, however, it means little, for well we know that the fairest women often are the most faithless, unreasoning and immoral. And Nature, itself, is as changing in its moods as is a woman. Ever mocking its own masterpieces, it creates only that it may destroy. At times it seems to exult over its own contradictions. It makes jests of its own laws, which men have been wont to regard as immutable. Its sweetest songs come from the throats of the most insignificant birds. Its rainbows are the products of storms. Its precious stones are found embedded in hoary rocks, which men must blast with gunpowder in order that sunlight may reveal the beauty of the gems. Less often to the stately mansions of the rich than to the wretched hovels of the poor does genius come to breathe her fire into the soul of the youth who is destined

to yield to men some of the treasured knowledge of the gods.

Shakespeare has said "Sweet are the uses of adversity, which, like a toad, ugly and venomous, hath yet a precious jewel in its head." And, my friends, though Nature, in a mischievous mood, did fashion me in a mould that made me scarcely less repulsive than adversity or a toad, it gave to me such a jewel as that of which Shakespeare spoke. It is because of my possession of this, as you shall see, that the world has seemed very fair to me, and my life well worth the living.

Despite the fact that my grotesque face has caused me to be regarded as a monstrosity, my father and mother were noted for their physical graces. Why I should have come into the world with such a terrible visage not even men of science have been able to understand. But, from the moment of my birth, in a small city in France, my mother, fond as she was of her other children, found the sight of me so hateful that she scarcely could be brought to look upon me.

Before I was a year old I was committed to the care of a peasant and his wife, who lived many miles from the chateau in which I was born. I remained there for the first eight years of my life, then I was sent to a school near Tours. There the ridicule to which I was subjected by reason of my grotesque appearance became so unbearable that I fled. I soon was overtaken, however, and my parents caused a tutor and his wife to be installed in a cottage that was situated in the heart of an old French forest. There I remained until I was twenty years of age. Then, for the first time in many years, I saw my father. He stayed with me only a few minutes, during which time my future was discussed. My father told me that if I would consent to assume the

name of Leon Grenault, and never reveal my relationship with my family, I would receive an income of ten thousand dollars a year. I accepted the condition, and, bidding farewell to my kind old tutor and his wife, I set out for Italy. Since then I have been an indefatigable traveller, but not until recently did I make my first visit to the United States.

I have said that, in fashioning me so unkindly, Nature gave to me something that was akin to the mythical jewel in the head of the repulsive toad. It is a sense of beauty. Since my early childhood I have been an inordinate lover of all that is beautiful. With me the search for the most beautiful faces, landscapes, flowers, gems, porcelains, pictures and poems has constituted the dominant purpose of my life. I will not pause to tell you to what absurd lengths my searches often took me, and what insupportable burdens of ridicule they have laid on my shoulders. There was nothing that was beautiful that did not charm me. There were many beautiful things for which I gladly would have sacrificed my life, merely to look upon.

With features so forbidding that all human beings shrink from me instinctively, I move among things of earth as the fallen angel moved among the shades of Paradise. The angel knew the reason of his fall, but what heinous sin I committed in some former period of existence, and for which I should be punished so cruelly, I know not. The sight of human happiness thrills me with sympathetic pleasure, while the suffering and sorrows of others drive me, sometimes, almost to madness, and I shrink from them as did Mephistopheles from the upraised cross. Incapable of inspiring affection in the breast of man, woman or child, it has seemed to me that I have craved love more than any creature of the earth. Only in my dreams does love come to me—from my

mother, from laughing children and—another. When I wake it is to seek things that are beautiful.

And it was in this quest for the beautiful that I found myself one day in Constantinople. It matters not to others what particular object it was that led me there, but, one day, while I was sitting in my room in a hotel, I was informed that Glyncamp, an American mindreader, had called to see me. As no man or woman ever before had expressed a desire to see me privately on other than business matters my surprise took the form of curiosity. Accordingly, I sent word to Glyncamp that I would see him.

My visitor greeted me cordially as he entered the room, and, frankly and without embarassment, he told me that, having observed me as I was passing along a street, he had been so impressed by my strange physical appearance that he desired to learn something of my mental qualities. I took the explanation in good part, and from that hour the remarkable American and I were friends. His vast store of learning filled me with even more wonder than did that mysterious power which enabled him to read the thoughts of human minds.

One day, while we were chatting together, Glyncamp asked me what was the dominant purpose of my life. I replied:

"When I have seen the most handsome man, the most beautiful woman and the most wonderful gem that the earth now holds, I shall die content."

Glyncamp laughed quietly.

"In that case you may prepare to die within the next two years, for I think I shall then be in a position to show all these to you," he said.

I looked at him incredulously.

"You have seen them?" I asked wondering.

"I have seen the woman," he replied, "and I know where, hidden in a wonderful valley, the man may be found—a man so handsome that he is said to believe himself a god. But the gem of which I speak, I have not seen. It soon will be mine, however."

"How did you come by this knowledge?" I asked.

The American looked at me sharply.

"That, my friend, is my affair," he answered, curtly.

Perceiving that I had been indiscreet, I apologized for the rudeness of my question. It pleased him to make light of the matter, however; then, suddenly, a look of gravity overspread his features.

"Would you take a journey to see this wonderful man?" he asked.

"I would travel around the world to see such a man," I replied enthusiastically.

"You would go to the United States."

"Yes."

"And report to me concerning what you saw?"

"Yes, yes."

He told me, then, that once, while he was testing his skill on an old painter, who had ridiculed his pretensions, he had learned his secret.

"Follow Nathan Bonfield when he goes into a great range of mountains, and he will lead you to the place where he guards his secret so jealously," Glyncamp explained. "But in no circumstances must Bonfield know that he is followed. If he were to discover you, it is more than probable that you would meet with a serious misadventure. Take with you a camera, and if you return to me with photographs of this remarkable young man, I will give to you the opportunity of seeing the most beautiful young woman who is on our earth to-day."

I accepted the conditions, and two days later I was on

my way to the United States. Greatly to my surprise, Glyncamp offered to pay the expenses of my journey in the event of my proving successful in my quest.

Upon arriving in the United States, I had considerable difficulty in locating the strange old artist, but, at last, I succeeded in discovering his haunts. Then I found the house in which he had his room. At length came a day when, having followed him, as I had done on several former occasions, I saw him enter the Grand Central Station. He was about to travel without luggage. So would I.

I boarded the train without a ticket, for, as yet, I had not the slightest idea what my destination was to be. I took a seat behind the car which Bonfield had entered, and it was while I was looking out of the window to assure myself that the painter was not leaving the car that I beheld, for the first time, the young woman whose beauty was destined to have such an important influence on my life. She, too, boarded the train—she and her escort entering the second car ahead of me.

I was now confronted by the greatest dilemma I ever had faced in my life. Should I follow the painter or the young woman?

I decided to follow the woman.

In the course of that long journey to the mountains I saw the young woman four times. Twice she and her escort left the train and took another. I, unobserved, did likewise, and on each occasion I was amazed to find that the painter made similar changes.

At last the young woman and the man who was with her alighted at a way station. I saw that buckboards were in waiting to take them and their luggage away, and, satisfied that I would have little difficulty in tracing them in the event of my return in the course of twenty-four

hours, I remained on the train to follow the painter. At the next station he, too, alighted. Here no vehicle of any description was in waiting, and from Bonfield's actions it soon became apparent that he expected none. Still wearing the same garments in which he had left New York, he entered the wilderness with all the assurance of a sturdy mountaineer. Once I saw him halt to fashion a stout stick into a staff, then, with this in his hands, he continued on his way.

Hour after hour I followed him, passing through one valley after another. Twice or thrice he turned to look behind him, but I kept myself concealed from his view.

At last, however, more than an hour after the evening shadows began to fall, we entered that strange mountain fastness that has been described to you—Deadwood Valley—and I knew by the action of the old painter that our journey was well-nigh done. Removing his hat, he wiped his forehead, then, placing his fingers to his mouth, he emitted a series of long, shrill whistles. These evoked from the other end of the valley sounds which were so similar that I fancied at first that they were only echoes of those I had heard before. The old man now resumed his journey with quickened steps. As I made my way along the narrow path and among the thick brush, I started as, moving around a great boulder that lay at the foot of the mountainside, I found myself within thirty paces of him. He was standing still, and it was apparent that he had decided to await there the coming of the man who had answered his signals. Moving stealthily nearer, I crouched down among the stones.

I had not long to wait, for scarcely five minutes passed before I heard the sounds of low voices, the swishing of branches and the snapping of twigs. Then, overcome by wonder and delight, I half rose and was about to utter an

expression of admiration when I realized my danger and restrained my emotions.

The mysterious young man whom I had come so many thousand miles to see was before me. Glyncamp was right. There could not have been a more splendid type of manhood in all the world!

If I had expected to see any demonstration of affection between this remarkable young man and the patriarch who had made this long journey to see him, I was disappointed. The painter saluted the younger man with marked respect. The intelligent features of the newcomer lightened for a moment, but neither by a bow nor the offer of a hand did he bid the graybeard welcome.

"I had not expected you so soon, Nathan," was all he said.

Then, as the two walked off together, I saw that an Indian was following them. At last they came to the door of a cavern through which they passed from my view.

Such, then, was my first view of Rayon Demain.

Having carefully noted the entrance to the cavern, and taken a view of the valley in order that I might carry certain landmarks in my mind, I set out again for the railroad. I was in no danger of losing my way, for it lay along a watercourse for a considerable distance, and, while I had been following the painter, I carefully noted in a memoranda book the position of landmarks that would serve for my future guidance.

By this time night had closed in on the wilderness, and, after going a little way, I lost the narrow path. I spent several minutes seeking it and, when I found it, I decided to wait until moonrise before proceeding further.

But by the time the moon rose I altered my purpose. Though I came to the mountains without luggage, I had

with me a pocket camera. I now decided that I would spend the following day in this valley and accomplish the purpose that had led me thither, before I undertook the task of finding the beautiful young woman I had seen on the train. I reflected that people do not make long journeys to mountainous districts to remain for only a few days, and there was little doubt that I would be as well able to trace the young woman two days hence as I would be to-morrow.

Accordingly, when the light of the moon streamed into the valley, I approached the cavern cautiously, then passed it and made my way along the shore of the lake to where the waters narrowed.

Heaven guided my steps that night, for, fatigued as I was, I walked on and on, vainly seeking something that would afford me shelter. And so, at last, I came to another valley.

Ah, how can I describe the sensations that overcame me as I beheld that vast moonlighted Paradise? But one who was quite as appreciative as I, and far more eloquent, has pictured its glories to you, so I will not weary you with my impressions. The names of these two valleys were, of course, unknown to me, so I called one the Valley of the Perfect Man, and the other the Valley of the Garden.

For nearly an hour, as I gazed upon the magnificent prospect that lay before me, I forgot my fatigue, and the very thought of sleep in the presence of so much beauty seemed impious. On and on I walked along the shore, now and then crossing, on stepping stones, little brooks whose murmurs seemed to be hymned eulogies of the loveliness around me.

At length, however, I stopped abruptly. Stealing softly to me through the forest-odored air came the sweet notes

of one of Chopin's nocturnes. For two or three minutes they held me spellbound, then all was still. My heart was beating wildly. Had I been dreaming? Had the notes I heard been the sighing of the nightwinds and the singing of the brooks that had echoed in the composer's fancy in the hour in which he had committed to paper that sweet, spirit-haunting air?

But, as I strode quickly onward, I knew that my senses had not deceived me. Before me rose the dark, shadowy outlines of a house that was constructed of roughly hewn forest logs. Glints of lamplight around the lowered shades indicated that within those walls were persons, happier than I, who had been watching the musician while the notes were stealing from the piano to where I stood listening in the forest.

For several minutes I halted and looked around me. I saw a stable and other outbuildings in the clearing, and, faintly outlined on the lake shore, were several small boats. Then, retreating into the woodland shadows, I listened expectantly. But from the house there came no sound. At last the glints of lights disappeared from the windows, and I knew that the occupants of the house had retired for the night.

In the forest fringe, just beyond the clearing, was a large, three-walled shed in which were standing several pieces of farm machinery and a covered wagon. On the seat of the wagon was a folded blanket. Here was the shelter I sought.

The open front of the shed faced the lake, and, having unfolded the blanket, I was preparing to wrap it around me and lie down on the bottom of the wagon, when I turned for a last look at the beautiful moonlit waters.

Once more I was on the point of turning away from the enchanting scene when something moving on the lake

caught my eye. Then I saw it was a canoe which was slowly approaching the beach. Crouching low in the wagon, I watched the little craft curiously. I saw it held only one person.

As the bow of the canoe touched the shore, its occupant leaped out and drew the boat up on the beach. This done, he stole noiselessly toward the house.

It was the Indian I had seen in the Valley of the Perfect Man!

Moving stealthily toward the darkened log-house, he tried the door. I saw him retreat from this, and then disappear in the shadow. Two or three minutes passed before he reappeared. Now he strode quickly to where he had left his canoe on the beach. Thrusting this back into the water, he leaped lightly aboard and seized his paddle. A few moments later boat and boatman had disappeared in the shadow cast over the water by a thick cluster of trees. So noiseless and stealthy had been his movements that, at times, one might have fancied that he was nothing more than the shadow of some great bird flying overhead.

This mysterious visit excited within me a feeling of uneasiness, and I watched for nearly half an hour longer, then, yielding at last to the fatigue of the day, I folded the blanket around me, and, lying down on the wagon floor, I slept.

I was awake at dawn, and, fearing discovery, I carefully refolded the blanket, and, after returning it to the seat on which I had found it, I left the shed. A healthy appetite was now beginning to assert itself, but curiosity still held me to the place. I was resolved to see something of the occupants of the log-house before I turned my back upon it, for I knew that it was no ordinary musician whose hands had swept those piano keys while the notes

of that wonderful nocturne were floating out to mingle with the forest airs. The thought had come to me that, perhaps, here I would find the woman I sought. Accordingly, I took my station in a leafy covert and waited.

My patience was at length rewarded. Something white appeared suddenly between the curtains of an open window. My blood leaped exultantly in my veins, and my eyes were almost dazzled by the fairest sight they ever had looked upon.

Before me, clad in the snowy, lace-trimmed gown that she had worn during the night, was the young woman whose beauty had enchanted me on the day before. The darkness of the night still lingered in the great, luxuriant mass of flowing hair, but on her face and in her eyes were reflected all the glowing splendors of the dawn. And, as I watched her, the house in which she stood assumed the aspect of a shrine around which sweet odors, whispering winds and the feathered singers of the forest were paying homage to their divinity.

Was Glyncamp wrong when he told me that he had seen the most beautiful woman in the world? Or was it possible that he indeed had seen the woman on whom I was gazing now?

For two or three minutes the fair creature stood at the window, looking at forest, lake and turquoise sky. Then she disappeared, and I, overwhelmed and intoxicated by her wondrous beauty, rose, turned and went staggering like a drunkard through the forest.

This, then, was the beginning of that love which so suddenly came to me and lighted all the candles in the gloomy hall of my life. Before, like a prisoner in a cell, I had been groping at each beautiful ray that had filtered in through my barred windows, but now—now I was

blinded by an effulgence that was more dazzling than the noonday sun.

On and on I strode until I came to a mountain trail, which, it was plain, led from the log-house in the Valley of the Garden. I had no thought of hunger now, and I travelled quickly, only pausing occasionally to drink at some laughing mountain brook. Leaving the log-house further and further behind me, I did not doubt that the trail I was following would bring me at last to the station at which I had seen the young woman and her escort alight from the train the preceding day.

My surmise proved to be correct, but, as I drew near the little village in which the station was situated, I hesitated. My face always had inspired fear and distrust among country people, and I asked myself whether it was wise for me to show myself at a place to which occupants of the log-house must come for their supplies. I did not want it known that there was a man of my appearance in the neighborhood, for, in such circumstances, all my movements would be carefully watched, and, without doubt, false stories concerning me would be circulated by superstitious persons who would suspect that I was none other than the devil himself.

I remembered that the next mountain hamlet was about ten miles further down the railway line, so, skirting the little village, I directed my steps to the station below.

Arriving at last at my destination, I disregarded the expressions of horror on the faces of the persons I met, and, after enjoying a hearty meal, I purchased a couple of mules, a kit of tools, firearms, fishing tackle, a compass and enough provisions to last me for a week. These purchases I made into stout packs and placed on the mules, then, with a dull-looking Swedish boy who, for a generous sum, found it possible to forgive the physical

abnormalities of his new master, I followed a trail which, for a considerable distance, ran parallel with the railway.

By nightfall I had found a site for my camp—in the wilderness about a mile north of the log-house, and a half a mile from the path that led from the Valley of the Perfect Man to the Valley of the Garden.

Carl, my boy, soon learned that I was not nearly so bad as Nature had painted me, and, after that difficulty was overcome, it was not long before I felt that I had his confidence.

A shack soon was constructed, but the first night the boy occupied it alone. Directing my steps again to the log-house, I took a station in the covert from which I had observed the beautiful stranger in the morning.

The action of the Indian on the night before had excited my distrust, and now that I knew whose safety might be menaced by anyone who had evil designs on the house or its occupants, I resolved to watch the place while it was otherwise unguarded.

The night passed without adventure, but, when morning dawned, I saw the young woman appear again at the window as I had seen her before. Now, however, I remained in my place of concealment, and later I saw her, clad in a dainty morning dress, step out into the clearing. I watched her while one of the menservants taught her how to handle the paddle of a canoe. In the afternoon I followed her as she walked along the beach or through the leafy aisles of the forest. But the man who had come with her to the mountains I did not see, and I wondered whether he was her brother or her husband.

Once I heard an elderly woman call to her—addressing her as "Paula." The servants addressed her as "Miss." But why should I, who was so afflicted with the most

hideous human features in all the world, exult to find that she still was unwed?

Night after night I kept vigil near the log-house, and once, waxing bold, I pinned some verses to one of her windows. Ah, how can I describe the sensations that overwhelmed me when I saw her take them from the envelope—when a rush of color came to her face, and a bright, wondering light slowly kindled in her eyes. Then, as I watched her closely, I saw she was not offended, and I wondered who it was she thought had written the lines.

I saw her leave the house a little more than an hour afterward, and enter her canoe, and my gaze followed her as, in the gleaming little craft, she glided over the waters of the lake. But when the canoe was headed for the northern shore my heart grew cold. Did she suspect the mystery that lurked amid the awe-inspiring shades of the Valley of the Perfect Man?

Then, with a rapidly beating heart, I ran along the shore, and, as I ran, I saw the canoe enter the stream that flowed through the mountain pass.

Before I succeeded in getting to this stream the storm broke. Strong as I am physically, the vigor of this baffled me. Blinded by lightning, battered by rain, deafened by thunder, and blocked by brooks, which, overflowing their banks, had become fiercely whirling torrents, my strength was spent at last, and I sought refuge between two rocks under a widespreading tree.

When the storm subsided, I saw two men leave the log-house and put out in a boat. That these were men-servants starting in search for the young woman was plain. The water was still too rough for the task they had undertaken, however, and before the boat was a hundred yards from the shore it was overturned. The men succeeded in swimming ashore.

I now continued on my way to the upper valley, and, in time, I arrived at the mountain pass. There I beheld the object of my search, but, loth to see her recoil from me, I did not reveal myself to her eyes. I resolved to watch her until the men from the log-house should succeed in getting to her.

At length, when twilight fell, I saw her move forward. Then, in the most wonderful voice I had ever heard, she sang to a beautiful air the words of the verses I had pinned to her window curtain in the morning, and I knew that it was to me—the unknown writer—that she sang.

And now, for the first time, the idea came to me that perhaps, after all, I might devise some means of making this wonderful woman mine—that we might love in spirit, as the angels love. I knew, however, that this would be impossible if she were to see me.

Scarcely had this thought taken form in my mind when I observed that the mysterious young man of the upper valley had approached and was watching the singer.

All of the strange words and scenes which followed were heard and witnessed by me. When the young woman was again alone, I spoke to her, and, unseen, I took her across the lake in the manner she has related.

The next day I left the valley behind me and secured the services of a clergyman who lived in a distant town. In the night shadows of the wilderness, Paula Trevison became my wife.

I was resolved that, from that moment, only in spirit should we meet. I would write to her and talk with her at times when she would be unable to see me. Taking advantage of her Eastern superstitions, I would make her believe that I was a spirit bridegroom.

Thus far all had gone well, but, in less than five minutes after the conclusion of the ceremony, my dream fabric

began to totter. My boy had just set off on muleback with the clergyman, when, from the direction of the log-house came the sounds of firearms. My heart seemed to leap to my throat, and a great fear held me spellbound. Then, from the brushwood rushed the figure of a man. For only a moment did I see his face in the moonlight.

It was Rayon Demain!

I hurried after him, and thus came to the log-house.

Many of the incidents that followed already have been described to you. Rayon acted like a frenzied demon. I dragged from the burning log-house the woman he had hurled into it, and I smote him down when he attacked the young woman who was now my wife. But those whom I served shrank from me appalled. Among them I had no friend. Then Rayon and I met for a second time. We grappled and fought—Hyperion with a satyr, and the satyr once more triumphed. Rayon again lay at my feet. I could have killed him then, but who was I that I should reduce to senseless dust that masterpiece of nature?

While I hesitated, Rayon rose suddenly to one of his elbows. Then he levelled a revolver at me, and fired. The ball entered my chest, and I fell.

I did not lose consciousness, but a great numbness overspread my body and I felt half-dazed. I forgot what had happened, and, rising, I went stumbling through the forest. Instinct led me to the shack. Two days before, I had caused my boy to purchase a third mule, for one of the others had gone lame. I mounted the lame one now, and rode along the trail to the railway. There I boarded the way car of a freight train, and fell unconscious on the floor.

When my senses returned to me I was in a comfortably furnished bungalow which, I soon learned, was the

Summer home of a New York physician—thirty miles distant from Deadwood Valley. I told my host I had been shot accidentally by a friend who doubtless had mistaken me for a deer.

Three weeks later I was in New York. There, after many unsuccessful efforts, I learned that Miss Trevison had gone to Europe.

In her confession to me on the lake, Paula had told me of her relationship with Prince Maranotti, and, believing that she had gone to him, I set out for Italy. There, of course, I failed to find her. I tried to get into communication with Glyncamp, but he had mysteriously disappeared.

For several months, amid the most harrowing disappointments, I continued my search, then I learned that in New York Miss Paula Trevison had become the wife of Philip Wadsworth. This information so affected me that I nearly lost my reason. Three or four times I was almost on the point of taking my life. How she had come to wed again while the man she believed to be her husband still was living, I could not understand. And yet, believing herself to be the wife of Rayon Demain, it was possible that, overcome with horror and loathing as the result of his mad acts on the night of the burning of the log-house, she had sought and obtained a divorce.

I now resolved to seek the young woman out and confess to her the manner in which I had deceived her. Accordingly, I went to New York and there learned she had parted from Wadsworth scarcely more than an hour after the wedding ceremony. Having obtained her address, I wrote to her, asking her to see me on the following day. In this letter I told her I had something of importance to reveal. Not only did she fail to answer my letter, but

she disappeared the day after she received it, and I learned she had gone to Europe. Once more I went to Italy.

I found Prince Maranotti at Basselanto, and informed him that his sister had become my wife. Not for a moment, however, did he believe I was speaking the truth, and he treated me as if I were a harmless lunatic. I called on him several times after this, but he refused to see me.

At dawn one morning I hid myself in the garden, thinking to meet him when he took his accustomed stroll before breakfast. The effort was successful, but he warned me that if I did not leave the grounds at once he would have me committed to an asylum. I knew he would keep his word, but, angered as I was, I was not disposed to offer violence to Paula's brother. So, with bowed head, I hurried to the railway station.

Convinced that my wife was not in Italy, I decided to return to New York. The following day I boarded a steamer at Naples, and it was not until I reached the United States that I learned of the death of Paula's brother on the morning I had left him.

Two days ago I was visited by a stranger, who informed me that Mr. Westfall was in possession of certain facts that it would be in my interest to know. Accordingly I called upon him and received the invitation which has resulted in my presence on the Barge of Haunted Lives.

"And so the Princess is the wife of the Gargoyle, after all," hissed the Whispering Gentleman, as he turned toward Westfall.

"No, no, it is impossible!" exclaimed the Fugitive Bridegroom, distractedly.

"If she isn't, it's not you, who deserted her, but the man who went through fire and water to get the Rajiid

diamonds for her, who ought to have her," growled the one-eyed Duckhunter.

"The law will quickly relieve her of her present desperate plight," said the Nervous Physician, complacently. "The law will not compel a woman to accept as her husband the man who killed her brother.

"Killed her brother!" exclaimed the Decapitated Man, wonderingly.

The Nervous Physician nodded, then, giving a sudden start, he glanced apprehensively over his left shoulder.

"You knew you were under suspicion, did you not?" asked Westfall, addressing the Sentimental Gargoyle.

"Under suspicion—yes," the Gargoyle answered. "It is suspicion that is founded on the fact that I was in the park of Basselanto on the morning of the murder of Prince Maranotti. That I was there at that time, I never have denied, but of his death I am guiltless, nor did I know at the time I left the park that any crime had been committed there. More than this, I know nothing of the identity of the murderer or of any motive for the awful deed."

"Well, if a gentleman who was able to give exceedingly damaging testimony against you had lived to tell his story, you would not now be here to assert your preposterous claim to this fair lady's hand," said the Nervous Physician, irritably.

The Gargoyle stiffened in his chair.

"Who was the gentleman of whom you speak, sir?" he demanded, sharply.

"Perhaps it is well that you tell your story now, Doctor," said Westfall, gravely.

The Nervous Physician nodded. Then, in quick, nervous accents, he began his narrative.

CHAPTER X

AT THE END OF A TRAIL

HAD THERE been occasion to mention my name in the course of the narratives that have preceded mine, I doubt not that most of you would have recognized the fact that in this company is one who has attained distinction in one of the most important branches of the medical profession. In short, my fame as a specialist in nervous diseases is international. I am the author of works that are recognized as standard authorities, and medals of honor have been bestowed upon me by several of the most highly esteemed learned societies of the world.

In the course of my investigation of nervous diseases I have acquired many extraordinary specimens of abnormal nervous organisms, and I may say that this collection has constituted the principal hobby of my life. In my museum are the brains of celebrated men and women, fibres from the fingers of celebrated musicians, vocal cords of famous singers and nerves taken from persons who were afflicted with extraordinary forms of nervous diseases.

In my efforts to add to this wonderful collection I have spared no time, trouble or expense. Even my conscience, occasionally, has been gagged and bound in the interest of science, which has been my god, my law, my wife, my daughter—everything.

Aware of this, it now will be easy for you to understand that when the extraordinary mind-reading feats of Mr. Glyncamp were reported to me, I should feel the most

lively curiosity concerning his wonderful nerve development. Indeed, I became so inordinately curious when I learned of such strange powers that I determined to seek out the man, win his friendship and, eventually, obtain his wonderful nerves for my museum. All this I would do, be it remembered, strictly in the interest of science.

Well, being distinctively a man of action, I did not long delay in putting my project into execution. I caused myself to be introduced to Glyncamp, and, as he was really a very approachable sort of a person, I soon enjoyed all the privileges of his friendship. Of two things, however, I was scrupulously careful. I said nothing to him concerning my collection, nor did I ever, on any occasion, permit him to touch my ungloved hands, or to lay a hand on my head. While in his presence I was careful to restrain my thoughts if they showed any disposition to wander to the real foundation of this strange friendship.

And Glyncamp trusted me. He was a man who had attained to the most extraordinary degree of intelligence I had ever known. But, in certain matters, he was unsophisticated. Though he was often most unscrupulous himself, he placed too much reliance on the good intentions of others. His cruelty was oftentimes amazing when he found it in his interest to inflict pain, but I never have known a man who could be angered so easily when someone else became a minister of cruelty.

Nearly all his life Glyncamp lived in the shadow of a great horror. Whether this was the price he had to pay for his possession of his wonderful mind-reading powers, he did not know, but he suspected this was the case.

He was subject to attacks of catalepsy. These attacks were sometimes so severe and prolonged that for several days at a time even a trained eye might seek in vain for some evidence of life. He feared that, while he was

under the influence of one of these terrible attacks, persons who did not know of his infirmity would cause him to be buried alive—a most horrible fate, my friends, and one which all of us carefully should guard against, for the means of doing this are very simple.

In order to reduce the possibility of such a terrible result, Glyncamp always carried in one of his pockets a letter explaining his weakness, and directing that under no circumstances should he be placed in a tomb until certain absolutely unmistakable evidences of death should become apparent to all who viewed his body. In addition to this letter, he always had pinned to his undershirt a piece of parchment on which a similar injunction was written with India ink.

Now so profoundly interested did I become in this strange case of Mr. Glyncamp that, pretending to be wearied of my practice, I told him I was preparing to go with him when he returned to Europe. Glyncamp was delighted. He told me that so long as I was with him he would breathe more freely, knowing that the terrible fate he dreaded would be impossible.

His fame in Europe was already established, and he now went to Turkey where he was paid a great sum each month for the detection of plans that had for their object the death of the Sultan.

It was not long before this strange man honored me with his full confidence, and this resulted in my learning some of the most remarkable things that ever had been brought to my knowledge. More than this, the revelations showed that my friend was a sort of knight-errant in a wonderful realm that is peopled only by lofty intellects. He was an idealist, who, having little interest in materialistic things, was constantly concerning himself with extraordinary psychic conditions. Nothing that was

normal appealed to him. It was in abnormalities that he sought that divine substance which Nature had engrafted in them unawares. In short, the man who was stealing the thoughts of others was always attempting to find even Nature off her guard.

It was while he was in Turkey that a Hindu came under his hands. By his subtle art, Glyncamp learned that the Hindu was a spy who had been instructed by the Rajah of Nauwar to watch an Englishman named Lord Galonfield, who was supposed to have in his possession the diamond eyes of the Rajiid Buddha—the most wonderful pair of diamonds ever known to man.

Glyncamp promptly lost all interest in his Turkish employment, and, masquerading as a European who had been converted to Buddhism, he went to the court of the Rajah of Nauwar. There he learned the story of the Rajiid stones.

I do not believe that Glyncamp cared any more for those diamonds than if they had been the commonest kind of moss agates. The triumph incident to getting them was all he sought, but he laid his plans with marvelous care, and when he left India he knew how the diamonds had been taken from the Buddha during the Indian Mutiny, and who was suspected of having taken them. He knew, too, how the uncle of the then living Earl of Galonfield had been captured and tortured and how his effort to commit suicide had been frustrated in order that he might be compelled to write a hundred letters, dated years ahead, to his father and brother, urging them to restore the diamonds to their proper owner.

But what had become of the stones he had not learned. The acquisition of this knowledge was to be his triumph. That the secret of their hiding place was in the possession

of the Galonfield family was more than probable. Accordingly, he went to England.

Glyncamp was on the point of wringing the secret from the dying Earl, when the son appeared. The Earl died, and Glyncamp fled, but, within a few hours, he had formulated a new plan.

The new Earl of Galonfield was young and unmarried. Glyncamp did not doubt that he was more or less susceptible to female charms. He would cause him to wed a woman through whom Glyncamp might obtain the diamonds.

In Turkey Glyncamp had learned that among all the beautiful women who were seen each week in the magnificent bathing rooms for women in Constantinople, there was none who could compare with Pauline, the daughter of Meschid Pasha, a well-known army officer. Like all sons and daughters of the Orient, Meschid Pasha was a great lover of precious stones and was known to have several noted gems in his collection.

Accordingly, Glyncamp visited Meschid Pasha and, formally proposing for the hand of his daughter, he offered in exchange the diamonds known as the "Lost Eyes of the Rajiid Buddha." Meschid accepted the proposal. Then Glyncamp told him how the diamonds might be obtained through Pauline herself. Meschid gave his assent to the plan and forthwith started for England with Pauline. Glyncamp, who, in the meantime, had employed spies to watch young Lord Galonfield's movements, accompanied the Pasha and his daughter.

I met Glyncamp on his arrival in England and when he told me what he had done, I gazed at him in astonishment.

"Do you so love the woman that you would give the diamonds for her?" I asked.

He laughed heartily.

"Why, no," he said. "She is certainly the most beautiful woman in the world, but I have no idea of really marrying her. Through her I shall get the diamonds—from Meschid. The man who is so base as to sell a woman well deserves the punishment I shall inflict on Meschid Pasha!"

"But the woman!" I persisted. "What is to become of her?"

"She will scarcely mourn my loss, for it is my purpose to unite her in marriage with the handsomest man in the world. The diamonds shall be her dowry, on condition that I be godfather at the first christening in the family."

My eyes were wide with wonder and incredulity. Glyncamp, watching my face, laughed heartily.

"Come, come, Doctor, you are not a fool," he said reprovingly. "What use would I, who care nothing for such baubles, have for such stones as these? I am a victim of chronic wanderlust. Where would I keep them? Why should I keep them? My friends have only a passing interest in crystallized vanities, so they would scarcely thank me for the display of the stones from time to time. And as for the woman—well. She is pretty, no doubt—but foolish, as all women are. My pipe and my glass—and you—would not be the sort of after-dinner company which would appeal to her, I'm afraid. And then, perhaps, some likely young physician might have little difficulty in convincing her that my first—or, at most, my second cataleptic attack was death itself. No, no, it would not do! The pleasure of winning the handsomest woman in the world and the finest pair of diamonds constitutes all the reward I desire. The Sultan of Turkey has been paying me too much for my poor services, and my fortune, to which there are no heirs, is becoming quite unmanagable. The detectives I am employing need it more than I.

No, no, my boy, the excitement of the chase is all I require. The fox and his brush can go to the dogs."

I shook my head doubtfully, as Glyncamp, chuckling, went to Meschid's to don his Turkish duenna's frock and veil and oversee Lord Galonfield's vain wooing of the fair woman who had enchanted him.

But it was not long before the smile left Glyncamp's features. His face grew longer and more grim. He had found in young Galonfield a foeman worthy of his steel. He also learned that the spies of the Rajah of Nauwar were swarming as thick as flies around the Earl.

And now the old lion began to fight. He felt that his wonderful skill had been challenged and that his own self-respect was at stake. I began to see less of him.

Suddenly, Glyncamp learned that Galonfield had disappeared. He traced him to Hetley, and there found that a grave had been opened—the grave of a young officer whose body had been sent to England during the Indian Mutiny.

The mind-reader scowled darkly as he muttered:

"I wonder if we will find the other one in a tomb."

Glyncamp kept his own counsel pretty well, after that, but, several weeks later, he startled me by asking how I would like to go with him to India.

I hesitated. The journey was long. But if anything happened to Glyncamp in India—if one of his cataleptic attacks should be mistaken for death——

And so I decided to accompany him.

We arrived at Rajiid just after Lord Galonfield had been released by the jaboowallah. It was Glyncamp who caused the retreating Earl to be seized again. The mind-reader had won the confidence of the Rajah under whose direction the jaboowallah had been working.

Glyncamp and I were hiding near at the time that

Forsythe had his interview with Galonfield. It was I, who, in accordance with Glyncamp's instructions, cut the vocal cords that made him the Whispering Gentleman.

But, as Lord Galonfield has said, all that Glyncamp was able to wring from him was too little and too late.

Upon our return to Europe, Glyncamp learned of Pauline's flight and of her relationship with Prince Maranotti. Through her he still hoped to be able to get the diamonds from Galonfield. He therefore used every possible effort to discover her whereabouts.

The mind-reader had told me of his conversation with the unfortunate creature who is known as the Gargoyle, and he failed to understand why this person had failed to write to him after his arrival in the United States.

At length, however, Glyncamp learned that detectives other than those in his employ were engaged in a search for Pauline Maranotti. Some of these were working in the interest of Lord Galonfield, but others still were representing the Gargoyle himself. Thus it came to pass that all the roads of the searchers led to Basselanto, and thither Glyncamp himself repaired.

The cataleptic attacks that afflicted Glyncamp lately had been becoming more and more frequent, and the anxiety which they caused me was telling more and more on my nerves. I never knew at what moment the mind-reader would move off on a new tangent without acquainting me with his design. And I was almost terror-stricken when I reflected on what might happen were he to fall a victim to one of these attacks while at sea. Persons who are supposed to be dead on ocean vessels are buried with a haste that always has seemed distinctly reprehensible to me. I knew this sort of thing could not go on forever. I was growing weary of constant leaps from one country to another, and I wondered how long it was going to last.

When Glyncamp went to Basselanto I remained at Paris. I had taken a severe cold that threatened me with pneumonia when from Naples came a dispatch that Glyncamp, the mind-reader, was dead.

Ill as I was, I hurried to Italy. In the course of the journey I sent several telegrams ahead of me commanding those who were in charge of the body to make no effort to embalm it. At last I reached the place where the body lay. A brief examination convinced me that he was still alive.

I soon revived him, but, though he was able to eat, he could not talk connectedly, and I knew that another and longer attack was imminent. I succeeded, however, in getting him aboard a vessel bound direct for New York. Two days later he again succumbed, and for ten days he lay motionless in his berth.

At the time he regained consciousness I was on deck. It was not until, returning to the stateroom, I found him standing in the mddle of the floor that I was aware of the change. His face was now white with anger.

"Where are we, Doctor?" he asked.

"Just coming in sight of Long Island," I replied.

"Long Island!" he exclaimed. "In Heaven's name, man, you don't mean to tell me that you have brought me back to America while—while that murderer, Leon Grenault, is still at large?"

"Murderer—Grenault!" I repeated.

"Yes. It was the devil-faced monster who assassinated Prince Maranotti. I was walking in the garden—when—when—Oh, you poor, maundering fool. I've had enough of you, and now——"

Seizing a heavy walking stick, the half-frenzied mind-reader aimed a blow at my head. I fled to the deck, and, not being a bold man, I did not venture to put my life

in jeopardy by confronting him before his anger subsided.

That night I sent him a note asking him if he had forgiven me. Replying by the same method, he said that if he saw my face again he would make it look more hideous than Grenault's.

I secured a stateroom elsewhere, and, until the vessel docked at New York, I kept to it.

While the luggage of the passengers was being examined on the dock, I saw a sudden rush of passengers toward the center of the big room. I was told that a man had fallen. Hurrying to the spot I saw that it was Glyncamp.

I quickly proved, not only that I was a physician, but that the fallen man was a personal friend. Several strangers then helped me to get him into a cab. I gave the cabman my address and told him to get there as speedily as possible. Arriving at my house, where my two servants remained as caretakers during my absence abroad, I had Glyncamp taken to my operating room. This done, I summoned two of my fellow physicians.

After making a careful examination of my patient, I pronounced him dead. The other physicians did likewise, then they left, and that night the death notices of Glyncamp, the mind-reader, were sent to all the papers. Not until long after midnight did reporters cease calling upon me for information concerning his death.

A sudden death in New York is always, of course, a coroner's case, and usually requires a post-mortem examination, therefore early on the following morning the coroner came to my house and viewed the body. When I explained, however, that, as his private physician, I had accompanied him on his travels and was with him when he died, the coroner was satisfied. I told him, how-

ever, that in the interests of science I would perform a post-mortem examination myself in the presence of any two physicians whom he might select. This arrangement was satisfactory and he left me. A couple of hours later two physicians, sent by the coroner, presented themselves and I led the way to the operating room. One of my visitors was Dr. Prellis, who had a modest private practice, the other was Dr. Felkner, a well-known surgeon, who was one of the principal members of a city hospital staff.

At my suggestion it was arranged that the examination for the cause of death should be conducted by Dr. Felkner, and that when this was done the body would be delivered to me in order that, in the interest of science, I might make an analysis of the nervous system of this wonderful man.

Dr. Felkner was a man of massive build, and, though slow of speech, his movements were singularly abrupt. When I saw that he was about to begin the dissection of the body, I slipped quietly from the room to get my spectacles which I had left in the study. I was in the act of placing these on my nose, when I was startled by a hoarse cry from the operating room.

I heard John, my butler, passing through the hall, and I called to him. When he entered I bade him tell the cook to have some refreshments for my guests ready in an hour, at which time I thought we would be through in the operating room.

The man was about to reply when I heard a second cry in the operating room, and the door was flung open suddenly. Dr. Prellis, whose face was as white as chalk, appeared on the threshold.

"Come, Doctor—come—quickly," he said, excitedly.

"What is the trouble?" I asked calmly.

But Prellis had disappeared. Adjusting my spectacles carefully, I followed him.

My consternation may easily be imagined when I saw Glyncamp, sitting almost upright on the operating table, and supported by Felkner. My poor friend's eyes were wide open and an expression of horror and agony was on his face.

"Glyncamp—alive!" I gasped.

A glance showed me that Felkner, beginning the operation with a deep, rapid incision, had inflicted a mortal wound.

Glyncamp, fixing his great, gleaming eyes on me, said in a low, resonant voice:

"You have done your will. Even while I lay in my stateroom on the vessel, your hands, resting on my head, revealed your thoughts to me. I knew that if I came under your power in New York I was doomed. That is why I resisted you. These two men are innocent of the crime that has been done here to-night. But you—you who knew the secret signs of my malady did not reveal them. You, whom I trusted, have murdered me. From this day forth, look where you will, you will see my face—in all shadows of the earth, in every cloud that floats above you—aye, and in the waters of the sea. The winds shall forever din a dead man's curse into your ears, and the warmth of the sun shall be to you a breath of that furnace to which all murderers are consigned at last. In light and in darkness—whether you be waking or sleeping—I shall ever be with you. And when Death stands before you, as you now stand before me, I will be beside him. Until then—until then—remember me."

He stiffened suddenly and his chin sank to his breast, but, even then, as the lustre faded from his eyes, they still

seemed to be staring at me from beneath their shaggy brows.

It was only the mad idea of a dying man, of course, for, if other capable physicians should have been deceived by indications of death, why should I have not been misled by them? But it was all very unfortunate, for, doubt me if you will, the dying man spoke truly when he told me that everywhere I looked I should see his face. In my dreams he stands before me. When I read, I know he is behind my shoulder. At the bottom of my coffee cup—in the lees of my wine—in the ashes of my cigar, his features are always taking form. Sometimes he comes to me suddenly, and appears in such unexpected places, that his ghostly presence, familiar as it has become to me, inspires me with terror. It is because of these terrible visitations that I have contracted the infirmity which has caused me to be known to you as the Nervous Physician.

The narrator paused, and for several moments no word was spoken.

"And, I suppose, examples of the wonderful nervous organism of your friend now constitute parts of that collection in which you take such pride," observed the Decapitated Man, gloomily.

The Nervous Physician glanced over his left shoulder and dodged slightly as if some one behind him had threatened him with a blow.

"Yes, yes," he replied, easily. "Among other things, I have the left hand intact. The right, however, and portions of the——"

"Stop!" commanded the Sentimental Gargoyle, imperiously. "When a man learns that such miserable

creatures inhabit the earth, he may not find it so difficult to leave it."

"You do not doubt that I—" the Nervous Physician began.

"I do not doubt at all," the Gargoyle interrupted. "That the cataleptic mind-reader was right when he accused you of his murder is a fact that is clear to all of us."

The Nervous Physician, turning slowly livid, rose unsteadily.

"Do I understand that you, the murderer of Prince Maranotti, charge me——"

"He is not the murderer of Prince Maranotti," said a quiet voice from one end of the table.

All eyes were turned toward the man who had spoken. It was the Homicidal Professor.

"On what authority do you contradict me, sir?" demanded the Nervous Physician, angrily.

"On the authority of the only witness to that terrible tragedy," said the Homicidal Professor. "Having heard what others have said of the affair, I am compelled to believe that I am the only person who saw Prince Maranotti die at the hands of his assassin."

"You were there?" asked the Nervous Physician, incredulously.

"Unfortunately—yes," sighed the Homicidal Professor, who, in obedience to a nod from Westfall, at once proceeded to recount his experience.

CHAPTER XI

"WHAT DREAMS MAY COME?"

WHILE listening to the stories of adventures and misadventures that have been narrated here, I have been irritated, from time to time, by the tendency of the narrators to suspect that certain effects were to be attributed to supernatural causes. Eventually the absurdity of such suspicions was proved, of course, but why, in the Twentieth Century, they should find even temporary lodgment in intelligent minds I am unable to understand.

Neither on our planet nor beyond it can exist anything that properly may be regarded as supernatural. Above nature there is nothing, but in nature there is much that finite eyes may not see—that finite brains may not comprehend. We know human reason may be wrecked or restored by the sounding of a dominant, though simple, musical note, just as a great Alpine avalanche may result from the discharge of a far distant gun. Though the association of such causes and effects bewilders us, who would be so bold as to invest them with supernatural qualities?

Until a few years ago a narrative such as you are about to have from me would be assigned to the category of "ghost stories." But Science knows better now. The scientific breeding of animals and culture of plants show that after a lapse of two or three generations there is a tendency toward what is known as "reversion to type"—that is, a sudden return to one of the distinct species that

was crossed in the breeding of the original stock. Thus from the egg of an Orpington hen, of pure breed, may issue a chicken which gradually assumes the appearance of a gray pheasant. Call it "reversion to type," if you will. In reality it is the return of an ancestor.

And in the human family the process of reincarnation is the same. A man lives and dies, and two generations of his descendants pass away, but in the third or fourth there again appears in the family line one who possesses his idiosyncrasies—temperamental and physical. And here we have the return of the human ancestor. Men may speak of such resemblances as supernatural, but science knows they are the products of nature herself.

It is in this ancestral reincarnation that we find the explanation for those idiosyncrasies which we designate as "antipathies." From one or more of these no man is free. Among my acquaintances there is a strong man who is conscious of an inexplicable feeling of horror whenever he comes within sight of the sea. Another has told me that to him death in the cellar of a burning house would be preferable to an attempt to save his life by passing through a tunnel so small that he would be obliged to move on hands and knees a distance of only fifty feet to safety in the open air. In the first case it is probable that drowning brought a former period of existence to an end. In the second it is reasonable to assume the inherited antipathy had its origin in some form of lingering death underground—the collapse of a mine, a fall into an empty well or premature burial in a cemetery.

From my earliest youth two antipathies have produced most distressing effects upon me. Never have I been persuaded to approach the edge of a cliff. Fear and faintness invariably overcome me whenever I look from the window of a tall building to the street below. But my

aversion to looking down from a lofty height is equalled by another. A strange numbness—the numbness of a nightmare—grips my faculties whenever my gaze falls, unexpectedly, upon a marble statue.

Being a man of science, I have made painstaking efforts, from time to time, to trace back to their origin certain antipathies that have come to my attention. For family reasons, which soon will be apparent to you, it was difficult to seek the origin of mine, but eventually these difficulties were removed and all was made clear to me in circumstances so extraordinary that, when I have described them, you will be inclined to regard them as incidents and delusions in the life of a madman.

Though a native of New York City, I am descended from one of the most distinguished families of Italy. For more than four centuries the house of Maranotti, rich, powerful and of ancient lineage, acknowledged no superior among the subjects of Italian sovereigns. But there came a time when its proud head was humbled to the dust, and its coronet and vast estates were forfeited to the King.

Prince Delevrente Maranotti, upon inheriting the title and estates of his ancestors, shortly after the fall of Napoleon had enabled the Italian rulers to return to their thrones, became involved in a conspiracy against his sovereign. This was discovered, and one night Basselanto, the family seat, was entered by the King's soldiers. In the struggle which ensued Delevrente was slain in his banquet hall. His estates reverted to the King, who, a few years later, bestowed them and the title on a younger branch of our family.

Meantime, Delevrente's only child, a son, was sent into exile. This son was my grandfather, who, upon leaving Italy, sought an asylum in France, where he married

the daughter of a French army officer. Shortly after the birth of my father the little family emigrated to the United States. Like my grandfather, my father died soon after entering the prime of manhood. My mother did not long survive him, and thus, at an early age, I was left an orphan.

A few days after my mother's death I was summoned to the office of a lawyer who informed me that it was the will of Prince Maranotti that I should be educated in a manner becoming the son of a gentleman, and that thereafter I was to look to him for aid in that direction.

The Prince was true to his word, and from that day until I attained my majority I wanted for nothing. When I came of age, however, I was requested to choose an occupation, and, shortly afterwards, when the chair of chemistry in a Western university was offered to me I promptly accepted it.

Soon after this my kind benefactor died, and his son, a young man of about my own age, succeeded to the title and estates of the Maranottis. The young Prince immediately began to manifest toward me the same generosity that had characterized his father. Several offers of financial aid were followed by a series of solicitations from the Prince inviting me to visit him at Basselanto, the last of these being of such a nature that I deemed a refusal to accept it would be an act of gross ingratitude.

To Basselanto, then, I repaired and found a welcome as cordial as ever brother extended to brother, and, as I walked arm in arm with my genial host through the palatial halls of my ancestors, much as I admired the grandeur of the place, I did not find it in my heart to envy him the possession of it. In all I saw I felt the same pride I should have felt had it been my own, for, though fortune had denied me possession of this, my

father's birthright, I still was a Maranotti and a child of the old mansion in which, for more than four centuries, my forefathers had dwelt.

The Prince conducted me from room to room, explaining to me the many objects of interest to be found in each. Together we visited the various sleeping apartments where my guide exhibited souvenirs of noted visitors who had partaken of the hospitality of our family. He showed to me the costly family jewels and the rare gold and silver plate which were contained in the secret closets, but the most interesting room of his residence he reserved to show me last.

"This room," my host explained, "was formerly the banquet hall of the Maranottis, but my father, wishing to enlarge his library, utilized the old portrait gallery for that purpose, and had the paintings hung here. A rather rough looking lot, these earlier ones, are they not? And the old gentlemen were as rough in their deeds as in their features, for some of them were veritable brigands."

Then, leading me from frame to frame, he commented on the pictures they contained—portraits of old noblemen and their ladies, with whose mirth this hall, now so sombre and silent, oft had echoed and re-echoed through many a long night of revelry. Now he would pause to recount to me the daring deeds of a brave and rugged warrior whose image looked down upon us from the wall. Then he would dwell upon the virtues and vices of occupants of other frames. This one slew his brother in a quarrel; that one captured a bride for himself from the master of one of the most formidable strongholds in Italy. The lady with a coronet on her brow was a Maranotti who wedded a doge.

His anecdotes interested me greatly, and I carefully noted all he said until we paused before the portrait of

a young man whose features were rather more striking than those of the others.

"This," said the Prince, "is the portrait of Miavolo di Maranotti, the son of the old gentleman there." And he pointed to the face of a rugged-featured man with white hair, in a neighboring frame. "It is believed," continued my host, "that this young man met his death at the hands of bandits while defending himself and a lady, with whom he was walking, from their attack. His body, which had been pierced with a sword, was found at the top of a cliff yonder, while that of his companion was picked up from the rocks below."

"How long ago did this happen?" I asked.

"About three centuries ago. That portrait yonder is of the Countess Diametta di Gordo, the other victim of that night."

Raising my eyes to the picture he indicated, I saw the face of a young woman of about twenty-two years of age. Her features were small and regular, and her complexion a beautiful creamy white. Her red lips, slightly parted, revealed a glimpse of her pearly teeth. The calm forehead, neither high nor low, was surmounted by hair of raven blackness, which, partly unconfined, fell upon her bare shoulders. Her eyes were dark and lustrous, and in them dwelt an expression that affected me strangely, for, stand as I would, their soft gaze seemed ever to rest upon my face as if striving to read in it the answer to some hidden problem.

The face of Diametta di Gordo was surpassingly beautiful, yet, strange as it may seem, I did not then remark that it was so, for her beauty appeared to be subordinate in interest to an indefinable expression that seemed to emanate from beneath the fringed lids of her dark eyes,

suffusing her features with a glow that gave to them the appearance of a sudden awakening to life.

Stepping back a little in order to note the effect of a change of light upon the picture, I was somewhat startled to observe what I thought to be an alteration in the expression of the face, which now seemed to wear a look of recognition. Turning quickly to the Prince, I perceived him to be regarding the portrait with such apparent indifference that I was satisfied he had failed to observe anything extraordinary, so, believing I had been deceived by the uncertain light of the apartment, I attempted to laugh away my ghostly fancies.

I made some commonplace remarks about the painting and the unhappy fate of its original, then we passed on to view the remaining portraits. While thus engaged, the face of the young woman that had so affected me passed out of my thoughts, but no sooner had the Prince left me than it again occupied a place in my mind to the exclusion of all else. During the remainder of the day, wherever I found myself, whether in the grove, in the drawing-room or among the musty tomes of the old library, that face, with its strange, inexplicable expression of recognition, was ever present.

The Prince had arranged an excursion for the morrow, and as the start was to be made at seven o'clock in the morning I retired early in order to obtain a good night's rest; but I had been in bed only a few minutes when I realized it would be impossible for me to sleep.

If I lay upon my side, I would see in the moonlight the white-robed figure of Diametta di Gordo standing near my bed, her garments swaying gently as the breezes entered the open windows. If I buried my face in the pillows, I seemed to be looking down, down, down to

where a white-clothed figure lay huddled and motionless in a rock-cluster, near the margin of a lake.

Unable to free myself from these nerve-racking illusions, I rose, dressed, descended the stairs and stepped out upon the terrace. The night was clear and the light of the full moon shed a spiritual radiance over the slumbering beauty of Italian scenery.

The bell of a neighboring monastery announced the hour of midnight as I followed a path leading to the lake. I had walked only a short distance, however, when there flashed into my mind the knowledge that the path ended at the edge of a cliff. Dominated by one of the antipathies of which I have spoken, I turned sharply and moved on in another direction until I came to a rustic bench near the entrance to a formal garden. There, in the shadow of a little group of poplars, I seated myself.

I had been on the bench only a few minutes when a feeling of drowsiness began to steal over me. Thinking I now would be able to sleep, I was about to rise for the purpose of returning to my room when I was startled by the crunching of footsteps on the gravel path. A moment later the figure of a man appeared on my left and my curiosity quickly gave place to amazement. Was there a masquerade at Bassellanto? If not, what meant the strange attire of this midnight stroller on the grounds?

He was a young man of about twenty-five years of age, rather above medium height. His face was swarthy and his hair and small moustache were black. But it was the fashion of his dress that excited my wonder, for it was of the style of three centuries before. His round, black cap was surmounted by a small white plume. He wore a close-fitting dark doublet, and high boots of light leather extended to his thighs. As he advanced quickly his left hand rested on the hilt of a sword.

"Ah, signor, you are in good time!"

The words, cheerily spoken, came from my right, and, looking around, I perceived another young man, attired in a costume rather similar to that which had excited my wonder only a few moments before.

"Ah, Antonio, it is you!" exclaimed the firstcomer, halting. "Yes. Ill fares the laggard at a feast."

"Your philosophy becomes you well," replied Antonio, laughing. "But, surely, you do not come alone. Your sister and——"

"They have preceded me," interrupted the other.

Arm in arm, they moved on together, and a turn in the path soon hid them from my view. My curiosity was about to impel me to follow them when a hand fell heavily on one of my shoulders. Turning hastily, I looked up into the face of an elderly man who was regarding me earnestly. He, too, was clad in the extraordinary attire that now was becoming familiar to me.

"Fortune favors me, signor," he said. "I was seeking you, and thought I might find you here."

"Indeed!" I stammered.

"Yes. I left your father a few minutes ago. He then was inquiring of all he met if they had seen you to-night."

"My father!" I repeated, in astonishment.

"Is it surprising that he seeks you at this hour?" the old man asked, reprovingly. "The guests are arriving and the festivities of the night are about to begin. All marvel at the absence of the son of their host. But come, come, my boy! This moping like an owl in the moonlight will lead to no good. Come with me to the hall and entertain your guests."

I rose from my seat like one who, roused suddenly, finds a vivid dream, with its misty figures and abruptly hushed voices, slipping away from him. Faint and

trembling, I tried to think, to reason. How had I come to that spot? Had I come alone? Ah, yes—all was growing clearer to me now. I had wanted to be alone—that I might think of her—of her whose face had haunted me for hours.

But how, I asked myself, had this woman, beautiful as she was, acquired such an influence over me? How could I account for the fever of excitement in my brain—for the dull, despairing sensation in my heart? Once more I seemed to look upon her smiling lips and into her questioning eyes. Then a full realization of the truth came to me like a leap of flame from sullenly smouldering embers.

I loved her.

I tried to reason with myself that such a love was impossible, for I never had even met the woman. Then, slowly, memory came to me. I had met her. It was only yesterday I had talked with her while she was gathering flowers in the garden. I had kissed her hand and had spoken to her of my love, and she had gently silenced me—as she had done, alas, many times before.

And now despair came to me. I became dizzy, and, reeling, would have fallen had not a pair of strong hands grasped me.

"What is the matter, signor? Are you ill?"

In a moment all was over.

"No," I replied. "I am all right now. But where do you lead me?"

"To the hall of Basselanto," my companion explained. "Do you not remember?"

"Yes, yes—to Basselanto," I answered. "I remember now."

The old man eyed me quizzically and retained his hold upon my arm. A few moments later the old mansion was

before me. All the rooms were brilliantly illuminated, and, through the windows, I saw figures in festal attire passing to and fro.

Upon passing through a doorway I found myself in the midst of a throng of guests, most of whom greeted me familiarly, but for several moments after my entrance I was so dazed that I was incapable of utterance. I felt that everything about me I had seen before, and I no longer marvelled at the old-fashioned dress that was worn by all. I was faintly conscious of the fact that the persons by whom I was surrounded were not unknown to me, but I was unable to recall their names.

As I seated myself on a chair, an old, though still hale and hearty, man approached me.

"My son, I have been alarmed at your absence," he said. "You should not have tarried so long. Why are you so late?"

"I fell asleep in the park," I replied, believing this to be the best way out of my dilemma.

"An odd time and place to fall asleep," the old gentleman muttered, suspiciously. "But it does not matter, now that you are here."

Turning, then, to a white-haired man with a dark face, who had just entered the room, he said: "Ah, Doctor, I am glad to see you. I feared you would not come."

The newcomer returned the greeting and seated himself near me.

The master of the house was in another part of the room, and I was viewing with increasing curiosity the strange scene around me, when a conversation which was being carried on near me arrested my attention.

"The theory is a strange one," I heard the Doctor say, "but there are Europeans who believe it to be indisputable."

"I must confess my ignorance of the subject," said his companion. "Perhaps you will enlighten me."

"Well, what knowledge I have has been obtained from the priests themselves," the Doctor went on. "They say that, after death, the soul of man does not enter the body of a beast, as many assume who believe in the doctrine of metempsychosis, but that it takes its abode in another human body in which form it receives the punishment to be meted out for the errors of its former period of life. To illustrate this, the priests relate the case of a man who, for some offense, had been condemned to be tortured to death. As he prepared to meet his doom he suddenly became as one insane, declaring that in his executioner he recognized a slave who once had belonged to him when he was chief of a desert tribe. This slave, he said, by his command had been flayed alive for disobedience. As the criminal was well known to have been a resident of the city since his birth, there were few who gave credence to his ravings, but these few trembled as they beheld the anguish of the dying man, for in it they believed they saw the justice of an avenging god who made the victim of the present sufferer the instrument of his wrath."

"Do you believe all this?" asked his friend.

The Doctor smiled gravely.

"At first I was as sceptical as you probably are, but—" he began.

I heard no more. Strains of music issued from an adjoining apartment and there was a general rush in that direction. I rose uncertainly. My thoughts were confused and, striving to escape observation, I went out to the hallway and thence to a large apartment which I perceived to be unoccupied. Rich tapestries and beautiful paintings adorned the walls. The floor was strewn with

the skins of the lion and the leopard and soft Oriental rugs. Marble statues of various sizes were arranged about the room, but these I scarcely noticed as I stepped toward a large mirror set in the wall.

Before this mirror I paused, and the reflection I saw there so astonished me as to render me incapable of action, for, instead of seeing my person reflected in the glass as I had expected to see it, clad in the conventional style of Paris in the Twentieth Century, I was confronted by the image of Miavolo di Maranotti, as I had seen it in the frame on the wall of the banquet hall on the preceding day.

Overcome and appalled by the metamorphosis I had undergone, I stood staring into the mirror, striving to grasp the meaning of it all, when I was startled by a laughing voice behind me.

"Signor, you are vain—so vain that you have forgotten to lead me to the dance."

How shall I describe the sensations which overwhelmed me as, turning quickly, I beheld the speaker of these words?

Spellbound and speechless, I felt as if I were about to fall. I tried to speak—to breathe—but I could not. Then a trembling seized me—my tense muscles relaxed, and, like the rush of air to a vacuum, my spirit sought my lips, and I whispered:

"Diametta!"

Yes, it was she whose face had haunted me for hours, and now, as I contemplated the dark hair, the lustrous eyes and the form which, despite its suppleness, possessed queenly grace and dignity, I felt it was no mortal on whom I gazed, but a denizen of one of those invisible realms on which the moonbeams rest before they seek our planet. Her dress, cut low in the fashion of her time,

revealed the perfect contour of her shoulders and full, round bosom. She was attired in white, and in her hair diamonds gleamed like stars in the dark field of the firmament.

"Signor!" she exclaimed, laughing merrily. "Why, you start as if you had seen a ghost!"

Struck by the singular propriety of her exclamation, I continued to gaze at her speechlessly. The laughter left her face.

"Ah, you are lost in one of your gloomy reveries again," she sighed. "Upon my word, you grow worse each day. Whoever heard of a man of your age gravely communing with Pluto while the noisy mirth of Venus was ringing in his ears?"

In stammering accents I was beginning some sort of reply when there entered the room a young man in whom I recognized the stranger who first had excited my wonder in the park. Upon seeing Diametta and myself, he advanced, and, after saluting us with a bow, he addressed himself to my companion.

"I was in search of you," he said pleasantly, as Diametta acknowledged his salutation. Then, turning to me, he asked:

"And, Cousin, where have you been hiding? Until now my search for you has been vain!"

"He has been here," Diametta replied. "I found him rehearsing the scene of a tragedy in front of the mirror."

"I had just entered," I explained, somewhat chagrined by their amusement. Then, turning toward Diametta, I continued: "But we are not too late for the dance which has just commenced. Shall we not go?"

"Pardon me while I accomplish the object that led me hither," said the young man, bowing low. "Lady, may I crave your favor for the next?"

"You have it, signor," replied Diametta graciously; then taking one of my arms, she accompanied me from the room.

It is idle for me to attempt to describe the sensations that dominated me while I walked on beside this beautiful woman. Vaguely, I remembered that someone had told me she had died nearly three centuries before, but I banished the memory as an idle fancy. Yielding to the gayety of her spirits, my burden of gloom grew lighter. As I mingled with the dancers, I made lively retorts to witty sallies that were addressed to me. My mind, however, seemed paralyzed by a sort of pleasurable wonder, for the words I spoke came without effort of thought. One-half of my personality seemed to be acting independently of the other half—one a wondering spectator of the performance of the other.

In a few moments I was taking, with perfect ease, the steps of a dance I never had before known. And we danced on and on—an old-world measure that was sometimes wild and free, and sometimes as stately as a minuet. And, as we danced, I thrilled to Diametta's touch and tried to look into her eyes, but their glances evaded mine. I whispered, but she seemed not to hear me.

At length the music ceased and the dancers dispersed among the various apartments of the mansion. As I accompanied Diametta to the place where she had expressed a desire to rest, I besought her favor for another dance. She reminded me the next was promised to my cousin, Bernardo. I begged for the following one, which she granted with ill-disguised reluctance.

Scarcely had we seated ourselves when we were surrounded by half a score of persons, and soon Bernardo, appearing to claim his partner, deprived me of whatever conversation I had hoped to have with Diametta. .

When I was alone I arose and stepped out upon the terrace. All the gayety I felt only a few minutes before had abandoned me. Diametta's reluctance to dance with me again depressed and irritated me.

From the moment I had been confronted by my reflection in the mirror I had been conscious of a rapidly increasing feeling of familiarity with the persons and objects that I saw. So fully defined became this impression at last that I no longer doubted that I was the son of the old gentleman who had addressed me upon my entrance to the hall, or that the young man then with Diametta was my cousin. Diametta, however, continued to occupy the most prominent place in my thoughts, and I distinctly remembered that on several former occasions I had told her of my love and asked her to become my wife.

With quick, impatient steps I strode to and fro on the terrace. As the music recommenced, I made an angry gesture of annoyance, for was she not, even now, leaning upon the arm of my cousin, in whom I saw a dangerous rival?

Stepping to one of the windows, I looked in upon the dancers. Yes, there they were together—one of her hands clasped in his, and from that moment not a gesture nor a smile of either of them escaped me. As I watched them, I could not doubt that my fears were well-founded, for that there was a difference in the attitude which Diametta assumed with respect to Bernardo and myself was painfully apparent. While dancing with me she had been gay and lively; with him she was quiet and gentle, seemingly taking a pleasurable interest in the words which fell from lips that were very close to her face. .

Unable to bear the sight, I turned away and continued to pace up and down the terrace.

In a few minutes the music ceased. I was engaged to Diametta for the next dance, but, fearing that if I entered at once to claim her I should betray my agitation, I determined to wait until I should become more calm.

At length I entered the mansion and began a search for my partner. I had passed through several rooms when I saw her walking slowly toward a door which opened on the terrace. One of her hands rested on an arm of Bernardo, and she was looking up at his face. Upon arriving at the door, Bernardo halted, and when Diametta passed out he followed her.

I waited a few moments; then, stepping quickly to the door, I looked out. They were descending the steps.

No tiger of the jungle ever stalked his prey more stealthily than I stole on after the lovers, who were walking slowly in the direction of the lake. The right arm of Bernardo now encircled the waist of his companion, and, as he whispered in her ear, his dark face almost touched her own.

Step by step I followed them, through gardens and grove, until they halted in a rustic pavilion overlooking the waters of the lake. There they seated themselves, and I crept softly forward to a place in the shadow of the structure where, unobserved, I might watch and listen.

For several moments neither of them spoke; then Diametta broke the silence.

"How beautiful it is out here to-night," she murmured, softly.

The strains of music in the hall of Basselanto fell upon my ears, but were unheeded by the lovers. The dance had commenced, and I was forgotten.

"All the world seems beautiful to me to-night," Bernardo said. "There is only one thing lacking to make it Paradise, and that, dear Diametta, is in your power

to bestow. It is the right to hold you always in my arms as I do now. Tell me, Diametta, do you love me? Will you be my wife?"

Was it the murmur of ripples on the rocks below, or the whispers of the nightwind in the branches overhead? Or was it the soft "yes" of a woman, borne from her lips by a sigh of happiness as she plighted her troth to the man she loved?

I know not whether the question of her lover was answered by word or by silence. She was lost to me—irredeemably lost. I was overcome by the violence of two powerful passions—of baffled love for the one and inveterate hate for the other. .

Rising from my place of concealment, I looked over the pavilion rail. I saw Diametta clasped in the arms of Bernardo. Her head rested on his shoulder as she submitted passively to the kisses he pressed to her face and hands. At length Bernardo, raising his eyes, saw that they were not alone. His exclamation of surprise caused Diametta to look up.

I leaped over the rail of the pavilion and stood before them.

"What brings you here?" Bernardo demanded, angrily.

"Pardon the intrusion, signor," I replied. "I came to seek my partner for the dance. Do you not hear the music, Diametta? We are late."

"No, no, Miavolo—no!" Diametta protested, weakly. "Not—not now. You have frightened me."

"Come," I directed, sternly.

"She has told you no," Bernardo said. "Now go."

He turned away, and, trembling with passion, I drew my sword. Grasping it in such a manner that the blade was below my hand, I swung my arm with all my strength,

striking him full in the temple with the brazen hilt of the weapon. He fell, stunned and bleeding, to the ground.

Diametta sprang toward me with a little cry, and I shrank from the unutterable hate that flashed out of her dark eyes. Then, regaining my composure, I sheathed my sword, and, moving toward her, offered her my arm.

"Pardon my rudeness in your presence," I said, "but my cousin's command to me was rudely spoken. It grows chill out here. Let us return to the hall."

As I moved toward her, she retreated, and so both of us passed out of the pavilion. Then, losing patience, I sprang toward her and seized one of her wrists.

"Diametta, I have several times asked you to be my wife," I went on, in a voice that now was trembling with my passion. "You have refused. If you do not now consent to——"

"Well, then, coward?"

Releasing her wrist, I drew my sword and silently pointed it toward the pavilion where Bernardo still lay upon the floor.

With a little cry she lurched toward me and caught one of my hands in both her own.

"No, no, Miavolo!" she cried. "Kill me, if you will, but do not harm him now. In the name of the love you say you bear me, do not harm him now!"

I tried to disengage my hand from her grasp, but she held it firmly. Finally I freed myself, and turned toward the pavilion, but as I did so she laid hold of my belt. I struggled with her for several moments, then, letting fall my sword, I seized her about the waist and flung her from me.

A piercing shriek rang in my ears, and, looking to see where she had fallen, I saw I stood near the edge of the cliff—alone.

Half-blind with horror, I tottered to the brink and looked down, hoping I might see clinging to some ledge or bush the beloved form I had cast from me. On the rocks below I saw her lying white and motionless in the moonlight.

I staggered backward as I realized what I had done. Gone now from firmament and lake was all the beauty that Diametta and her lover had extolled only a few minutes before. The waters and the hills they loved so well seemed to frown dark and threateningly upon me, and the stars, glittering in sky and lake, appeared to be the shining hosts of Heaven assembled to bear witness to the enormity of my crime.

The exclamation of a man caused me to turn around, and I perceived my cousin, Bernardo, standing within a few paces of me.

"What have you done?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"I have killed her," I answered, regarding him calmly.

He did not speak. Reeling like a drunken man, he leaned against a tree. I did not pity him, as, waiting, I contemplated his misery. The pale, blood-stained face which, only a few minutes before had been illumined by the light of noble passion failed to excite my sympathy, for in the staggering wretch before me I saw only the man who had dashed my cup of happiness to the ground and made me the murderer of the woman I loved.

But I had not long to wait. Bernardo soon recovered himself and, drawing his sword, advanced silently to meet me. I picked up my own blade from the ground and awaited his attack.

Little did I suspect that the hatred that then was forged in my heart and brain was to endure, like my love for Diametta, through coming ages—that, like Bernardo, I

was to live only that I might love and hate and fight and die—to live again.

Bernardo attacked me furiously, and, assuming the defensive, I guarded cautiously, believing that in a few moments I would be able to take advantage of my opponent's recklessness. At length, penetrating his guard, I inflicted a slight wound in his shoulder, whereupon he began to defend himself more carefully.

As we fought on, we moved further and further away from the pavilion and the edge of the cliff—a dangerous proceeding for us both, for on the ever-changing ground there were missteps to be feared, and, in such circumstances, a single misstep would mean death. And so, as we circled, advanced or retreated, there was no cessation of the death rattle made by our parrying and thrusting blades.

But the end came suddenly. I just had parried a dangerous thrust when I saw behind my antagonist a female figure, clothed in white. Was it she—Diametta? No, it was only a marble statue of the goddess Diana which—a great chill benumbed my body—my sword fell from my hand—the stars seemed to fall from the skies—my head swam—I reeled—and knew no more.

Upon opening my eyes I saw the sun had risen and that I was lying on a rustic seat in the park of Basselanto. As I rose to a sitting posture I was conscious of a feeling of numbness in my limbs. I was trying to recall the events of the night when a laughing voice fell on my ears.

"Ah, good morning, Cousin. You have risen early, but come in and have breakfast. We will be ready to start in an hour."

Glancing up, I saw my young host, the Prince Maranotti, standing beside me; but, as I rose to take the hand he extended toward me, I drew back trembling and

aghast, for, gazing into the eyes of my generous benefactor, I saw that through them the soul of the hated Bernardo looked me in the face.

Once more the hot blood surged to my head, and I knew that the struggle in which Bernardo and Miavolo had been engaged on this spot three centuries before had not been finished. Divine justice had punished me by depriving me of my birthright, but I now lived to fight again.

From the manner in which the Prince shrank from me I knew he saw my purpose in my eyes..

"Great God, man, are you mad?" he faltered.

The words were scarcely spoken when we grappled. I thought to hear him call for aid, but he was silent as, straining every effort, each of us contested for the mastery.

We did not fight as Anglo-Saxons fight—with clenched fists—but as savages, with the joints of crooked thumbs thrust deep in throbbing, choking throats. We fought with knees and feet, and, as each used all his might, we moved toward the edge of the cliff. So near did we get to it at last that twice or thrice stones were moved by our straining, twisting feet and fell into the abyss near which we tottered. Panting, cursing, groaning and half-fainting, we maintained our struggle.

Then one of my feet slipped, and a cry of despair escaped me. My adversary, thinking as I did, that I was about to fall, drew back. By a miracle I recovered my balance and reeled toward him. Again we clinched, swung round and parted. My open hands thrust his shoulders. Weak as was the effort, it sufficed. As the Prince fell backward from the cliff, I heard him groan, then his body flashed from my view.

Three days later I was in Paris. There, seated at

breakfast, I read in a newspaper an account of the death of Prince Maranotti. That he was murdered there could be no doubt, for the ground at the top of the cliff beneath which his body was found bore traces of a violent struggle.

I returned to this country on a steamer that sailed from Southampton, and since then I have been little more than a pariah. Unable to obtain employment without credentials, I was compelled to abandon the vocation of chemist and shun old friends and acquaintances, with the result that for several weeks I have been a workman in a paper-box factory.

None but a man who has felt the blighting curse of Cain can know what it means to be fleeing always from that remorseless spirit of the law which requires "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth and a life for a life." And yet it is not punishment that may be administered by men that I fear. That from which I shrink is the certainty that, in the fateful cycle of eternal existence, my soul must be seared again by the baleful fire of a love that cannot die—a love for which Bernardo and I must fight, as we have fought before, near the marble statue of Diana on the cliff of Basselanto.

CHAPTER XII

THE DRAINED GLASS

As the Homicidal Professor finished his narrative, he turned to the Nervous Physician.

"And so, you see, sir, your friend Glyncamp had something else on his mind when you understood him to say that the Gargoyle was the murderer of Prince Maranotti," he said.

"His language was a little disjunctive at the time," murmured the Nervous Physician, thoughtfully. "But I can't quite understand why a man who possesses the characteristics of the Gargoyle should stop at anything, yet everybody now seems disposed to make a hero of him."

The Gargoyle laughed mirthlessly as he reached for a decanter and poured more wine into his glass.

"You do everybody an injustice, Doctor," he replied. "Heroes are made of nobler clay than that which Nature found available when she fashioned me. Heroes are capable of inspiring affection in the hearts of friends, but in the heart of man or woman the Gargoyle has no place."

The one-eyed Duckhunter, clearing his throat, laid his hands on the table and looked at them meditatively. The Hypochondriacal Painter sighed and stroked his beard.

"You are wrong, sir," said Westfall, composedly. "With one exception, perhaps, I think I may safely say that all of us are now your friends."

"By the exception, our host means me," the Nervous

Physician explained. "Having been more or less interested in the late Mr. Glyncamp's intentions concerning this young lady, I must confess that I do not find quite to my liking this Twentieth Century adaptation of the old story of 'The Beauty and the Beast.' "

The Gargoyle, twirling his glass of wine with nervous fingers, laughed softly.

"It was a pretty story," said the Duckhunter, thoughtfully. "But, since the Princess in that tale found the face of a noble gentleman behind the face of the monster, why is it not possible that our Princess has made a similar discovery in the case of the hero of her romance?"

"If the old poets are to be believed, satyrs have been loved by some of the fairest nymphs," observed the Hypochondriacal Painter, solemnly.

The Decapitated Man rose abruptly, then, throwing on the table the napkin which had been lying on his knee, he walked to where the Gargoyle sat and held out his hand. The Gargoyle looked up sharply, hesitated, then, rising, he grasped the extended hand and bowed.

The Decapitated Man turned to the Aeronaut.

"Madame—" he begun.

"Stop!" exclaimed the Gargoyle, sharply. "Though you mean kindly, let us not draw aside the veil that hides the face of Truth."

"I will spare you that trouble, then," said the Princess, as she raised and threw back the veil that had concealed her features.

She was very pale, but her lips and eyes were smiling, as she added:

"Gentleman, I am prepared to receive your congratulations."

"Paula!" exclaimed the Fugitive Bridegroom. "Are you mad? Do you not know that——"

"I know many things that I had not even suspected before I came to the Barge of Haunted Lives," the Princess interrupted.

The Gargoyle dropped the hand of the Decapitated Man, and the Duckhunter, who sat beside him, saw that he was trembling. But in the ugly, perpetually smiling face there was no change. It was in a slightly shaking voice that he asked:

"Madame, am I to understand that—that you have so overcome your dislike for me that you are willing to acknowledge me as your—your husband?"

"Yes," the Princess answered, quietly. "Like the Princess in the old tale to which the Nervous Physician has referred, the Princess Maranotti has found her fairy Prince at last."

The Gargoyle shook his head, then, seating himself abstractedly, he toyed with his glass.

"Unfortunately for me, Princess, I came too late into the world to profit by the fairy powers that could transform a monster into a man who might be capable of winning and retaining Beauty's love," he said. "As I have told you, Glyncamp once asked me to tell him what was the dominant purpose in my life, and I replied 'When I have seen the most beautiful man, the most beautiful woman, and the most wonderful gem that the earth now holds, I shall die content.' Thanks to the mission on which the mindreader sent me, I have seen these. Therefore, I should be content. But, Princess, I once cherished the wish that I might be your spirit lover—that, as I lurked beside the paths along which you walked, I might hear your voice—that, keeping vigil under your window while you were sleeping, I might know no harm was threatening you. And, if it is permitted spirits to return to the earth, your spirit lover I will always be. But

your husband I can never be. There is here one who should have a greater claim on your affections than the unsightly Gargoyle. It is not he whose idle fancies caused him to desert you after he had led you to the altar, but he who braved so many cruel, unknown enemies in his grim attempt to get the Rajiid diamonds and lay them at your feet. It is to the long life and eternal happiness of Lord and Lady Galonfield that I drink."

As the guests looked at him with wondering, fascinated eyes, the Gargoyle rose and slowly raised his glass, then, with a quick movement, he drained it of its contents.

"Gentleman," said the Gargoyle, calmly, "some of our stories have been long, and the dawn is breaking. By its light I shall be the first to leave the Barge of Haunted Lives."

He turned slowly, and began to walk toward the arched doorway. He moved steadily enough at first, but, after going four or five paces, he was seen to totter.

The guests rose hastily, and Westfall started toward the halting man. He was too late. Before the hand of his host could grasp his arm, the Gargoyle fell to the floor.

A few moments later the Princess was kneeling at his side. The eyes of the dying man grew brighter.

As Galonfield raised the Gargoyle's head and shoulders, the Princess pressed her lips to the brow that never had felt the touch of human lips before.

The Gargoyle took her hands.

"Good-night, my Princess," he murmured, weakly. "If, in your dreams, you seek my wandering spirit, you will find it waiting to receive you in—in the Valley of the Garden."

And it was in the Valley of the Garden that, a year and a half later, a man and a woman stood beside a

marble shaft on which was inscribed the name of Leon Grenault.

Lord Galonfield, looking toward the northern end of the lake, asked, quietly:

"And yonder lies the Valley of the Perfect Man?"

"Yonder is the Valley of the Perfect Man," his wife answered, softly. "But the Perfect Man lies here."

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